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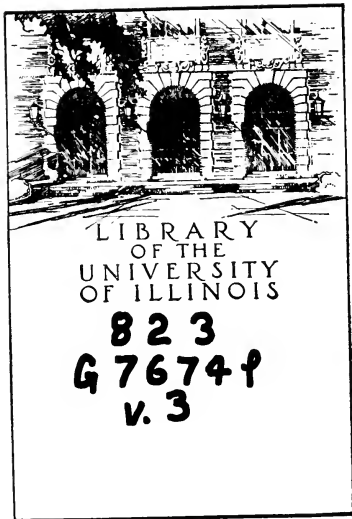
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LESCAR,  
THE UNIVERSALIST.

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VOL. III.



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# LESCAR,

## THE UNIVERSALIST.

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
"ARTISTE," "BRIGHT MORNING," ETC.

"Enough! to speed a parting friend  
'Tis vain alike to speak and listen;  
Yet stay—these feeble accents blend  
With rays of light from eyes that glisten.  
Good-bye! once more; and kindly tell,  
In words of peace, 'the young world's story,'  
And say, besides, he loved *too* well  
His mother's soil, his father's glory."

OLIVER W. HOLMES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:  
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY.

1874.

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LONDON :  
PRINTED BY VIRTUE AND CO.,  
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# LESCAR,

THE UNIVERSALIST.

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## CHAPTER I.

“I have lived, I shall say, so much since then,  
Gi'en up myself so many times,  
Gained me the gains of various men,  
Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes,  
Yet one thing—one in my heart's full scope—  
Either I missed, or—itself missed me.”

ROBERT BROWNING.

THE carriage which contained Lady Curzon Kellam, with her two nieces, had scarcely turned out of the gateway of Laburnum Sweep, when there entered, walking along by the frosty pathway, and sauntering up under the shadow of the old elms, two young men in close and eager conversation.

They entered the house, they passed into the still-crowded drawing-room, and in a few minutes

were exchanging a cordial greeting with Mr. Sarcroft and his cheery little wife.

There had been every variety of men in that room that afternoon—men young and old, men English and foreign—artistic men, literary men—a motley crowd of many and varied type; but among them all, these two last arrivals were instantly distinguished by every curious and observant eye. Who were they? where had they come from?

“Handsome”—“Foreigners certainly”—“Ah! the travellers, no doubt.” Such remarks buzzed around them, as our two friends, both a little changed since we last saw them, stood in the centre of the crowded room, and returned Mrs. Sarcroft’s affectionate greeting.

“Ah, Orestes! Ah, mon cher Pylades! Mille fois les bienvenus!”

Mrs. Sarcroft was a little woman, who always found her enthusiastic sentiments most easily expressed in French.

Victor stood smiling before her, bright and graceful as ever, his fair cheek a little bronzed by these years of travel, his eye keener and more full of power and energy; but still very unchanged, the same sunny, boyish, smiling Victor he had been at Cambridge or in Paris three years ago.

And beside him stood Piers, much the most altered of the two. A Frenchman, even when really half Scotch, as was Victor, is a being that developes early into the maturity of himself. An Englishman is quite the contrary. He generally ripens slowly; he continues to alter long. If we knew him, and wondered over his future, at twenty-one, it is probable we wonder more over the altered and perhaps unexpected results when we meet him again at thirty. A Frenchman alters fifty times in a twelvemonth, and rebounds again always into—himself. An Englishman alters slowly, by gradual, steady degrees, and the alteration implies development and maturity. It is the mellowing of the crude roughness of youth that has taken place: for good or bad, the character has been built up, the man has altered from the unfinished boy; but the man is made now, and will not alter again.

So any old friend of Piers Ashton would have felt as they watched him standing by Victor's side that evening, answering Mrs. Sarcroft's queries with a little of his old gravity, but with perfect self-possession and ease. The self-consciousness had left him—that shy boyish *gaucherie* that had stamped him in old days a British fledgling wherever he went; and that curious

air of defiant obstinacy with which he used to disguise his shyness was gone as well. The natural sweetness of his dark eyes, and the well-bred grace of his simple manners, had easy play.

Piers would have been singled out now in any assemblage as a handsome, thorough-bred, distinguished-looking Englishman. It was still rather a dreamy face; the eyes had a way of drooping under their long dark lashes, with an absent look in them as if his thoughts were wandering vaguely away; and the crimson colour retained a youthful trick of rushing over his cheek, if people spoke to him suddenly, or any new acquaintance scrutinized his countenance with too curious a gaze. He wore a moustache now, and a short-cut pointed beard.

Mrs. Sarcroft admired Piers enormously, and was a little afraid of him. She admired Victor, if anything, still more, and *him*—she adored with the frank undisguised devotion which it was generally his happy fortune to inspire.

The two had arrived only the night before in London, and their present host had been the first acquaintance they met. Their last *rencontre* had been in the Vale of Jehoshaphat, in the far East; and they had cemented, during their sojourn in the neighbourhood, one of those friendships that

spring up so rapidly among travellers encountering each other as kindred spirits in foreign lands ; and Mrs. Sarcroft was now enchanted to welcome them to her home.

“ I am so glad to see you,” she exclaimed again and again. “ I have been telling all kinds of people you were coming, this whole afternoon ; and no doubt you have got numbers of friends—people, I dare say, you have met in all corners of the globe.

“ I see several,” said Victor, laughing. “ I can count a man from each of the four continents already.”

“ Of course you can. Let me see—charming, how amusing, to be sure ! I was convinced you would know everybody.”

“ There is Alibi Ula, for one,” said Piers. “ We saw him last at the Pasha’s banquet in Bagdad. He told me he was coming over to study, and I gave him two or three introductions to the Dons at Cambridge. I wonder how he is getting on.”

“ And there is Captain Vesey-Repton, I see, over there : why, he was British Consul at Aden when the *Clyte* put in there. Capital ! ”

“ Oh, I knew it would be so ; and they are all dying to see you, *cher* Pylades. Go and talk to Alibi Ula : he has been feeling like an Israelite

among the Philistines, poor man, the whole afternoon ; I know he has."

"Ah, and there is the Mexican Consul ; and—good Heavens ! Piers, be still and tremble : behold Miss Catharine Proute ! Mrs. Sarcroft, too cruel, I declare : it is a perfect snare."

"Why, do *you* know her?—do you mind her?" said little Mrs. Sarcroft, opening her merry eyes with the sweetest affectation of innocence.

"Mind her !" exclaimed Piers with a groan.

"Oh, you do not mind her a bit, Piers. I never saw anything like his courage," laughed Victor. "As for me, I am trembling, Mrs. Sarcroft, from head to foot. We met her in Massachusetts, and she—good gracious, she sees me ! Piers, you huge hulking fellow, you coward, get in front of me, do. Ah, Dieu ! I am undone."

And as Piers moved with an expression of grim determination to one side, Victor rushed forward, met the delighted Miss Proute half-way in her journey across the room, caught her hand, and raised it with effusive enthusiasm to his lips.

"What a disgraceful humbug !" laughed Mrs. Sarcroft.

"Ah !" said her husband, "Lescar likes the kind of thing, does he ? Well, I will not quarrel



with his taste, if he keeps her on that side of the room. Ashton, have you seen these Roman antiques? Look, I am convinced this is a genuine head of Tiberius. What do you say, eh? That's it, Fanny; go and help poor Lescar to defend himself against your strong-minded friend."

"Wal," Miss Proute was saying meanwhile to Victor, in that wonderful twang of hers, and with a prolonged emphasis, "so you have shown up! Knew you right off, in a minute."

"And I knew you in one lightning glance," he answered.

"Eh, well! We *are* in the old country now, and I am having a laudable time. How do you come along, Frenchman? Saw you last in Boston City, did not I now?"

"Boston! No; my memory serves me better. Could I possibly forget? Massachussets, was it not? Do you not remember St. Jonathan's Hall, the State Festival; the recital by one sweet voice of our poor poet Béranger—an oration in certain silver tones on Eden's sovereign queen?"

"On whom?—what? Frenchman, you are jocular!"

"On Eden's queen, and her gentle sceptre."

"On Woman's Rights, you are trying to say in that Frenchified jargon of yours."

“ On lovely woman ! ” he assented.

“ Well, she ain’t necessarily lovely, is she ? ”

“ When is she otherwise ; or charming, at all events, in our poor dazzled sight ? ”

“ Blarney ! ” exclaimed Miss Proute, indignantly. “ Don’t you come any of your sugary rubbish over *me*, though we ain’t in the States. My Heavens ! why, *that* is the place to live in after all ! t’other side the water, I mean. We know how to keep young fellers in their place over there.”

“ In our place ! Are we not always in our place ? ” he said.

“ Where is that ? ” she retorted, looking at him with somewhat suspicious and distrustful eyes. They puzzled her, these Frenchmen : she did not half feel she saw through this one now. “ Where is that ? ” she repeated, as Victor still bent with deference.

“ At *your* feet,” he replied ; and he raised his head after one more profound obeisance, and passed smilingly on.

His eyes had caught some one else, far away, down at the other end of the room. Surely that bright smile was for her, not for Miss Catharine, whom he left, feeling somewhat puzzled and discomfited, in the middle of the room, as he moved

quickly away, and hurried with two eager hands extended towards Madame Prioleau.

“My dear boy! Are *you* Mrs. Sarcroft’s traveller?”

“Dear, dear friend!” He slipped into a seat beside her, and in an instant they had plunged into the warmest discourse.

Where had he been? It would take weeks to tell her. Where she had been?—it was impossible to describe in this one little hour. What he had done?—ah! difficult to express in any sort of language. What she had done?—the newspapers and that glittering cross of the order of St. John, hanging on the ribbon round her throat, had already told him without a single word.

Then—friends had to be discussed, mutual friends, dear—more than dear, well-beloved to each. One after another were mentioned, and they exchanged information upon all.

Madame d’Alnigni was snugly at home in Paris: Victor had seen her only the other day. And Père Dax was in the Place St. Etienne, laid aside long ago from watchmaking, as from political dream or plot, enjoying a happy placid old age. And Faustine?—was handsomer than ever.

Victor’s face softened, but also clouded, as he

spoke of her. She was a dear, warm-hearted girl, he said ; his best friend in the world—more than a sister to him. But he could not go altogether along with her.

She was wildly exciting herself just now, with all the old set, over the trial of Pierre Bonaparte and the funeral of Victor Noir. And Rochecarre had nearly got into serious trouble ; for—as the funeral cortége passed along the Champs Elysées, there had been a threatened outbreak among the populace, and Rochecarre had made an oration bristling with sedition and revolutionary words.

And much more of all this he could tell her—of Bouchet, Lachène, Henri Tolberg, and many others ; of all that boiling, turbulent substratum of political life in Paris, that was seething like the threatening waves of an angry ocean round the steps of the imperial throne.

And the “Universal” ? Ah, a strange maelstrom was the “Universal,” indeed, by that date. Happy for old Dax that he was almost past understanding it all ; happy, thrice happy, had it been for Henri Tolberg had he never caught the delirious fever of that phantom dream. Henri never went to the Gobelins now, where he might have been a great master-worker long ago, if he had cared. But he wandered from café to café, from

town to town, now at Geneva, now at Brussels, Lyons, Marseilles, but chiefly in Paris; he haunted the noisy meetings of the "Universal," drank poison from the ruby lips of Faustine at night at the Place St. Etienne, and rang its dangerous echoes among his brother-revolutionists night and day. God only knew where it was to end, said Victor; God only knew where the angry stream would finally flow. But he thought (and he lowered his voice as he whispered this to Madame Prioleau) that stormy days for France were not far distant.

The gilded shell of its social follies must break ere long, he said; the fiery furnace stream of turbulent humanity in that seething under-current would find an exit, would flood its iron limits irrepressibly soon.

"What is coming?" she whispered with earnest anxiety.

"Revolution or war, God only knows which," Victor answered her solemnly. "The old swords have lain rusty all my day, madame. My father has come back from Algiers, and is doing his child's play, as he calls it, with his troops on the Champ de Mars every morning now. He is full colonel, and his Artillery is a glorious corps."

"You are a soldier at heart yourself, my dear

boy," she exclaimed, as she answered the exulting smile of his blue sparkling eyes.

"Of course I am, and I am as proud of the dear old father,—I cannot tell you how proud! I do half regret I did not go in for soldiering from the beginning when I see him now, especially as all the rest has failed. Ah! Madame Prioleau, the dreams of youth! the beautiful golden dreams!"

"You will act all the better in the day's work, dear friend, for that rose-glow on the morning of your life, even though it must float away with all other fair feathery mists of the dawn."

"I hope so," he said earnestly—"I hope so: God knows!"

"I am sure of it," she replied.

"My dear old father," he continued, "does not regret my not having followed his profession all along; he still thinks, as I used to say, time enough when my country wants me. Meantime, he likes me to have travelled and done all I have done."

"And, now?" she said questioningly.

"Well, you know I have not deserted the 'Universal'—I will never do that; so I am over in their service now."

"In what capacity?"

"Hush! we must speak low. There are meet-

ings to take place," he murmured, "in Soho and Leicester Square: there are myriads of them there—Germans, French, Poles, everything. I am going to try and sift the conditions a little, and see if anything can be done to preserve something like sanity, Madame Prioleau, among us all. Tomorrow morning we are to see Franx and Oler; and in the evening we are all to meet."

"And your friend? How improved he is; how handsome he has grown!"

"Has he not?"

"And he still goes along with you?"

"Oh, of course; we do everything together. I could not imagine life without him."

"Orestes and Pylades," she answered, laughing softly, as she watched his enthusiastic gaze towards his friend.

"Exactly," he continued. "Ah, well! surely it is a satisfaction to feel there is something real left in life—somebody that will not alter—something that will not prove a dream?"

"And you have, neither of you, *ever* found a somebody for each of you—an impersonification of all you dream?" she asked.

"My queen, my queen!" murmured Victor softly. "No, madame; she is a fair phantom. I am pursuing her still, with eager longing, I

assure you. And Piers,—no, he has been proof against charmers, rivalling Miss Catharine Proute in America, against Eastern Houris, against soft-eyed Australians, and bewitching syrens of many climes—proof as I have been myself. Do you know,” he went on, “once, three years ago, before we left Paris, I used to think Piers was, the least little bit in the world, tender and sentimental about Faustine; but when I saw them again together, the other day, I realised it was utter fancy on my part, or that he had entirely recovered the soft passion by the sovereign remedy of change of air. He certainly does not care now for her. I fear he was rather disgusted than otherwise by the energetic enthusiasm of her politics. Poor Faustine! she would have made a Charlotte Corday or a Madame Roland, if she had lived eighty years ago. No play, in these prosaic days, for such volcanic temperaments. Yes, I fear she rather disgusted him. Do you know, in confidence I tell you, Madame Prioleau (and a genuinely appropriate secret it is to tell a sweet woman friend), I often think Piers nurses in that silent soul of his some very, very old and, to me, unknown ideal. He has taken to talking of the days of his youth in a sentimental manner lately; and I more than half suspect this return to Eng-



land has some deeply hidden tender meaning to him."

"But would he not tell you?" she asked.

"No; there are some things fellows never talk of to each other, even to their dearest friends. There are some memories would have their bloom swept from them by the faintest revelation; and some names would be tarnished in our own hearts by speaking them even in the tenderest tone, and—well, I do not know anything about it, as you see; but I mean to watch Piers!"

"And is he still in sympathies a Universalist?"

"Madame Prioleau," Victor answered earnestly, "in that he is like most of us: he has awakened from many an old cherished dream. He has a strong wish at present to see his old guardian again; and that, I think, is the principal cause of his return to England. They have not met for years; and there is some coldness between them. Ah! Sarcroft has, at last, released him: here he comes!" And Victor rose to make room for Piers, as the latter, with hand eagerly extended, approached Madame Prioleau to claim a recognition in his turn.

A few cordial words passed between them, and then she rose to go.

“How you have kept me!” she said to them. “I wonder if dear little Mrs. Sarcroft ever dines: her afternoon friends never seem to wish to leave her. What pleasant *réunions* hers always are! and to-day has been doubly charming. Do you know,” she continued, turning to Piers, “I shall remember this afternoon, Mr. Ashton, by an event almost as pleasant as my meeting with you two again. I have made a new acquaintance, who has charmed me—a countrywoman of yours. I feel she is going to interest me very much.”

“Indeed!” said Piers. “I wish I were as fortunate as you, madame. I have never found my countrywomen very interesting; at least, certainly, not for the last ten years.”

“How many of them have you seen, misanthropist?” exclaimed Victor.

“Certainly, very few for ages,” Piers admitted. “I have been back in London only twenty-four hours, and I do not feel converted yet.”

“What unpardonable impatience! Well, at all events, you shall not make a cynic of me. I am charmed with my two pretty sisters, and the eldest has already quite won a soft place in my heart. But, then, their father was my very old friend; and I think I loved easily that bright

young face, reflecting my old pleasant memory of Sir John Graeme."

"Sir John Graeme!" exclaimed Piers; and the deep, sudden crimson flush coloured for an instant his dark face.

"Yes, of course," said Madame Prioleau, looking straight at him, "my sisters are the two beautiful Miss Graemes. Why, everybody is talking about them."

"Donna and Gaie Graeme!" continued Piers, with astonished emphasis. "They were here, in this room, to-day?"

"Just five minutes before you entered it."

"Extraordinary! How I wish I had come ten minutes sooner!" he exclaimed cordially.

"I wish you had. You know them, then?"

"Why my guardian (my uncle, as I always called him) was Sir John Graeme."

"How very odd! What a combination of curious coincidences! How unlucky you did not come in a quarter of an hour earlier. But, after all, it does not matter: you will see them at any time. Let me think. Why, at five o'clock to-morrow, Miss Graeme has promised to come to visit me. Shall I tell her? But, no: why, what nonsense I am talking! Of course you will see her at once, in the morning, long before I do."

Piers's face became very grave.

"I do not know about that," he said. "Madame Prioleau, you are to see her to-morrow. Would you mind, kindly, as a particular favour, *not* mentioning my name to her?"

"Certainly not, if you do not wish it," she replied, with slight astonishment in her tones.

"No; please not just yet," he said. "The fact is, madame, I may not see them after all. It is very unfortunate, but my guardian is seriously offended with me, and I suppose he has good cause to be so. You will easily understand. He did not quite approve of my politics, and my proceedings generally, when I was quite a young fellow, and went off in that harum-scarum way without taking my degree at Cambridge. But afterwards he wrote me a letter, a capital kind letter, just like himself, and unfortunately it came to the Hôtel Barreilles after Vic. and I had left it three years ago, and the *gérant*, a particular friend of ours, and a funny, queer-notioned old boy, not being able to hear of our whereabouts, laid it up in safe preservation for me till we appeared the other day, and then he gave it me, as we were passing through on our way here; and with it was a second letter, sent, you see, after the first, to which my guardian had had no

reply. The first was kindness itself, full of entreaty and remonstrance on what some one had evidently (indeed he confessed it) been reporting to him, as to my very evil ways. It was the sort of letter I would not have left a day unanswered for a kingdom—and there it lay; and with it the second, which was the most fiery, indignant effusion I ever read from my guardian's pen. I knew he could work up into just wrath now and then; but I never imagined he could emit such a volcanic outburst as that. But he was evidently tired of me and my Bohemianism, and the letter informed me that he washed his hands of me for ever—would not see me again—shut his doors against me, and pronounced me every vagabond reprobate epithet you please. It was the last letter, he said, he would ever write me, and evidently he never wrote again; and only imagine what he must think of me, both these letters unanswered till this day!”

“How very unfortunate!” said Madame Prioleau.

“Is it not? And by the tone of both letters, somebody had evidently been maligning me and all my friends most unconscionably to him.”

“Dear! too vexatious! But if old Sir John is anything like what I remember the young Sir

John, he will easily be brought to listen to explanations."

"He is very tough and irascible," said Piers doubtfully. "I must try and find him to-morrow morning, and meantime you will now understand my request. You see, unless he quite makes it up with me, I should not like Donna to hear anything about me. My uncle (I call him so most naturally) might think I was trying to approach him surreptitiously through her."

"I quite see," said Madame Prioleau quietly; and Victor, who had stood silent all this time looking into Piers's flushed and eager face, turned away at this point, and blew a low prolonged whistle to himself. He had already begun the surreptitious watching of his friend.

"I *must* go!" said Madame Prioleau again.

"Let me take you to your carriage then," said Piers; and he led her away, leaving Victor deserted.

"Ah, hah!" said the latter, sagely, to himself, as he watched them disappear through the room. "Ah! the sweet distant aroma of the rose!"

"And you are really to see Donna Graeme to-morrow?" Piers said, as he led Madame Prioleau across the hall.

“Yes, certainly ; I hope I am. She interests me extremely ; she is one of the most charming, the most intellectual, and most utterly unaffected girls I have ever known.”

“Is she ?” he said, as he put his friend into her carriage, and clasped her kind hand once more.

“She is. I am perfectly charmed with her.”

“Good night,” Piers said. His tone was dreamy and absent, and Madame Prioleau looked curiously and with an amused expression into his face. “Good night,” he said again ; and then the carriage drove off, and left him standing on the door-step alone.

In two minutes Victor found him there, and roused him, by a friendly clap on the shoulder, from his misty memory, and his formless, shadowy, prospective, and retrospective dream.

## CHAPTER II.

“Lo! here what gentleness these women have,  
How busy they be us to keep and save  
Both in hele and also in sicknèss,  
And always right sorriè for our distrèss ;  
In evéry manère thus do they shew ruth  
That in them is all goodness and all truth.”

GEOFFREY CHAUCER.

WHEN Donna arrived next day at the little house in Tilney Street, Mayfair, the afternoon was just passing into evening, and the early London twilight of the short February day was falling soft and dusky in Madame Prioleau's little room.

Donna had had a skirmish over that visit with Lady Kellam at luncheon. It was not at all according to the aunt's ideas that girls should be allowed to form independent intimacies, especially with out-of-the-way sort of people like Madame Prioleau.

But Sir John had come in suddenly upon the controversy, and had utterly pooh-poohed Lady Kellam's scruples. For Donna had told him in



the morning of her meeting with his old friend at Laburnum Sweep.

“ Ah, how very odd ! I remember the Prioleaus perfectly,” he had said. “ Delightful people, most kind and hospitable to Derrington and me. And I remember the daughter especially : a very handsome girl she was in those days, Donna ; but that is five-and-twenty years ago. Let me see, she must have been about sixteen at that time, and—yes, I remember perfectly—she was already engaged to be married to a handsome wild young cousin, a Prioleau too. I wonder if she ever did marry him ? I suppose so. ‘ Madame ’ Prioleau, they call her, do they not ? Yes, it was a French settlement then, and they were all of French descent. No doubt she is a widow. Certainly, go and see her, and say that, with her permission, I will call upon her to-morrow morning : I fear I cannot manage it to-day.”

So Lady Kellam, though fuming and indignant, was quite overruled, and Donna went.

Her new friend had excited a strange interest in her mind. These quick responsive currents of sympathy are curious things in our human nature ; and Donna was not a psychologist, and did not analyze the feeling ; she only knew she longed to see Madame Prioleau again, and she longed to

talk to her, for she had an instinctive conviction that Madame Prioleau would understand what she said.

The room was very dusky as she entered ; outside there was a fog falling ; it was nearly dark ; but the little simple apartment looked cosy and home-like : a bright fire burned cheerily in the grate, a low tea-table stood near it, a little couch, a couple of large easy-chairs on either side, a well-filled bookcase opposite, a table covered with work and every variety of literature in the centre of the room.

Madame Prioleau sat in a window recess, at a writing-table covered with packets of papers and piles of lengthy-looking documents, one of which, by the light of a small green-shaded lamp, she was busily perusing when Donna entered, making pencil notes, as she read, on the broad margin of each page.

She rose instantly.

“ My dear child, I am so glad to see you.”

“ But you are so busy,” Donna said. “ I am only disturbing you.”

“ No ; I am glad to be disturbed. I have been sitting here through all the dusk and fog of this thoroughly London day, and it seemed still little more than morning when I had to light my lamp.

You will do me a great deal of good. Sit down. Here, take this little seat."

And Madame Prioleau seated herself in a corner of the low couch, and made Donna draw the little fauteuil close to her, the tiny tea-table between them. Madame Prioleau certainly looked pale and weary this evening. She remained silent for a few minutes, and Donna's eyes wandered to the writing-table and its crowded evidences of hard work.

"How delightful to be so occupied!" she said. "It must be so interesting to have found so much to do."

"I find it more interesting to rest sometimes," Madame Prioleau answered, "and to turn to other people and their work. Are you wondering what all that is about?" she added, smiling, as Donna's eyes still turned to her window-recess.

"Very much," the girl answered with ready frankness. "You know, I do wonder, Madame Prioleau, what exceptional people like you, who have regular careers and settled occupations—what it is exactly you find all day long to do."

"This is an idle time with me, you see," Madame Prioleau answered, "and I am taking the opportunity to revise all my papers on Nursing, that I jotted down hurriedly, in the course of

many suggestive experiences, and I hope to have them ready in a few weeks for the press."

"To print them?" said Donna.

"Of course, yes. I wrote them with that object. I hope they may perhaps do good.

"How delightful!" sighed Donna. "What a perfect life! You not only have a career, a great, definite, glorious career of your own, but you write books besides, and in your idle minutes achieve the utmost ambitions of our smaller souls."

"Is your utmost ambition to write a book, dear child?"

"To write a book?" Donna answered. "No, not exactly; at least, sometimes it is. But my ambitions vary so, Madame Prioleau; yours, I suppose, never do?"

"As to ambition, I do not know that I have ever had any. Long ago I used to be told I was culpably void of that quality; but I do not now think it *was* culpable."

She paused a moment, and was silent again. Then she stooped forward and poured out some tea.

"I have made myself very tired this evening," she said. "It has been so good for me that you have come. I have been doing trying work—

reading old manuscripts of years ago, and reviving memories that I thought had lost their pain."

"Dear Madame Prioleau !"

"Yes, I find this inactive literary life tries me : action, even though often of a painful kind, has been so long my habit."

"Are you going to stay here in London permanently now ?"

"I do not in the least know. At this moment there seems a curious pause in all my work ; and, looking around, I cannot quite decide where my next field of action is to lie. Of course there is plenty for all to do here in London, if once I determined to settle. The governor of St. Bartholomew's has been with me, offering me a possible future, to-day."

"And will you accept it ?"

"I do not know, dear child. I never felt so undecided. If I do, I should have to bind myself for three years ; and, somehow, my instincts suggest suspension for the moment—a pause in my prospects, as it were. I do not quite see the path before me. I think I will wait ; and yet it may be, after all, indolence on my part. I cannot detect any direction from whence I anticipate any other kind of call. Peace seems to reign over Europe just now ; the whole tendency of the age

seems to be peace. I cannot conceive what instinct it is makes me pause, with the fancy that I may have a call."

The fingers of one hand were playing absently, as she spoke, with the jewelled cross of St. John, given her by the Austrian army. It hung as usual round her neck.

"Do you always see the paths just before you? Do you always know exactly what you ought to do?" asked Donna.

"Yes; it is always shown me clearly, without possibility of any doubt. I could tell you curious instances of the means by which I have been led, quite unconsciously sometimes, in the direction of my intended work. I had not the least idea that war was going to break out between Italy and Austria when I went, that spring, to Mentana and Solferino, and to the Mediterranean coast; and yet there I was. The war broke out, and the Italian Ambulance Commissioners sent for me. I was so glad I happened to be there."

"Did you choose the life from the very first?" Donna ventured to ask earnestly.

"No; events led me to it, as is the case with most histories. I fancy, events have much to do in casting the moulds of our lives."

"Do you think events will always lead us right

at last? I do not know," said Donna. "Events seem to lead me to more and more difficult thoughts every day."

"Do not the events correspond with the thoughts satisfactorily? Tell me a little. I have been talking about myself entirely, and I wanted so very much to talk of you. Help me to get rid of this tiresome individuality of my own for a little while."

"But, madame, it is so interesting to talk of your life, and in mine there has been nothing the least interesting at all."

"All young lives are interesting, dear child; and yours? You have been living a great deal of life of your own, I think, however tranquil its apparent stream may have been."

"I have tried to study a great deal."

"And you love your studies?"

"Sometimes yes, very much."

"Other times it is tilling a rocky soil?"

"Yes, a soil of which the harvest seems to be practically—nothing. I enjoy it often; other times, I do not know why I study at all."

"Has it been all alone?"

"Papa has helped me, and of course I have liked it always with him; but then he was a great deal away from the Old Towers, and when he was

not there I was alone ; for Gaie does not care for books much, and she never could see any object in them even for me."

"And what was your object ; I mean, the figure in your mind towards which you worked ?"

"I do not know," said Donna ; "that is just what puzzles me. When I am very tired—and I often am tired after some things—I cannot see any object, and I do not know why I do it. And then, since I have been in London, Madame Prioleau, and heard people talk of the higher education of women, I cannot see the object of that again ; because I have done it all myself, you see, and I know how it feels."

"Higher education is all good," said Madame Prioleau, "if people rightly appreciate what higher education exactly means. We want women's powers to be better trained most certainly."

"Yes, and I think if I had been trained and led up to a fixed definite destiny for all one's powers as they are, it might have been better ; but just with knowledge of facts and the contents of certain books, I do not see what a woman can do."

"Enjoy it for its own sake. If she had cultured intellectual tastes she would be able to do this," said Madame Prioleau. "That is just what we want for women of the upper and idler classes



—that cultivation of taste that gives them higher interests and occupations.”

“Oh, but only for such a little, little bit of themselves,” pleaded Donna.

“You mean a woman cannot possibly satisfy the whole range of her womanly affections by the cultivation of intellect ; she is a woman still. We do not want her to do so ; we want a great deal left in *your* character, for instance, besides your taste for Greek or Latin verses and scientific facts. But one need not hurt the other.”

“No, but it is not satisfactory ; it deceives her,” persisted Donna. “A woman, I think, always imagines, when she takes to study, that mind is going to fill her life, and then she finds it does not ; she has so many great ideas besides. I do not care for all I know, Madame Prioleau, although papa often says he thinks I could pass any of the Cambridge test examinations. I am so tired of it ; indeed, indeed, I am.”

“Come here, dear child,” said Madame Prioleau ; and she made room for Donna by her on the sofa. “There, sit down ; now tell me a great deal more.”

Donna turned towards her, put out both her hands, and put them into Madame Prioleau’s, and looked earnestly into her face.

"I am sure," she said, "it is not all I might do. I want to be quite different; I want to do some great devoted work,—like yours, for instance. I hate my dreary books and learning—learning without any object or end."

"My dear, your life has not been shaped like mine. Remember your father."

"Yes, yes; I could never leave him, I know: that is just the difficulty. And this life we are leading now,—I have to live it, because he says he wishes it."

"But the life you are leading now is not so very dreadful, is it? Tell me about it; where does it fail to please you?"

"Madame Prioleau," said Donna earnestly, "can *you* think it right, when there is so much to be done,—so much, oh, that people like you are doing,—can it be right to care for silly, foolish things? I cannot see any straight way anywhere for me, though I see grand ways for everybody else, only *I* may not go in them."

"Is your inclination then to work among the poor the life of a philanthropist? is that what attracts you, Donna?"

"I do not know; no. I tried that, Madame Prioleau, up at home, you know. There are plenty of poor people, and I do work among them;

and of course I know it is right, and I do it still ; but it seems so little. Ah, no ! that does not satisfy me," she went on. "I see great things that might be done, that I want to have done ; but I do not think I—I do not think any woman—could ever do them. It seems to me all man's work."

"Political philanthropy, you mean ;—well, the modern woman is in a fair way to have her share in that too," said Madame Prioleau. "But I do not know that after all she will ever achieve anything very much higher in that line than her old sweet destiny of the Inspirer."

"Ah, that is it. Do you not think a woman's work should always be to *make* great lives?"

"'By just my love I might have saved this man,  
And made a nobler poem for the world than all  
I've failed in,'"

quoted Madame Prioleau softly, pushing back the dark hair from the girl's forehead. "Well, these are a woman's lines, Donna, and express the conclusion a woman—the greatest woman-writer, perhaps, that ever lived—arrived at, and she seemed to agree with your view."

"Aurora Leigh?" said Donna.

"Yes, Elizabeth Barrett Browning ; she seemed

to outstrip her womanhood, only to turn and pay it homage in its humblest and least self-asserting guise."

"And do you not think it is dreadful when a woman is self-asserting?" said Donna.

"Miss Catharine Proute!" laughed Madame. "Well, you see this is not the age of chivalry exactly, and women have often to stand alone."

"That is it," said Donna emphatically. "Madame Prioleau, you do not like the idea, do you, of women in Parliament, and having votes at elections, and all that sort of thing? Papa says, if it all comes during our lifetime, Gaie and I will have to vote."

"Of course you will," said Madame Prioleau, amused. "But it has not come to it yet; it is a difficult question, however. You see, women placed as you and your sister are, sheltered carefully from every evil that could possibly assail your feminine weakness, must not run away with one side of the case—what might be called the poetic and sentimental side,—the old chivalrous ideas, as I said before, of our sex. We must remember what thousands of women there are, unprotected, whose weakness is occasion for every sort of cruelty and abuse. Their interests are not always sufficiently remembered in legislation, and

I doubt if they will ever be so, until their happier sister-women take up their cause."

"Perhaps," said Donna thoughtfully, "I never can see more than one side."

"Exactly; and this is a question that has decidedly this other side. My only doubt—if you ask me my own theory on the subject—is, whether the number of women, whose position entitled them to vote, and who had intelligence and leisure sufficient to understand and advocate these important woman's questions, would ever be large enough to influence the balance of any political scale. I am rather inclined to think they might do more by that personal influence exercised with intelligence and gentle enthusiasm upon the members of that sex who already hold the scales of legislation in their hands. But that is the old poetic view again, dear, and I may practically be obliged to resign it (in the end), though I cling to it with cherishing tenderness. I still think, if women took the trouble to understand the intimate workings of the woman's question, and gave it the interest and effort of their lives, they might do much without having votes in Parliament. I cherish the idea they could even do more."

"If they could only see the way."

“They must look for it; and all this higher education you would depreciate is certainly a step in the right direction, if only with the view of sobering our feminine minds, making them thoughtful and earnest, training us to their use, their application, their discipline. That is what we want in the education of our women. We want to obtain a higher and different class of being, appreciative and sympathetic, who is logical and methodical—a being trained to direct herself, capable of influencing and directing others. This is the sort of aim we should have, in our efforts at higher education,—the training and discipline of character, more than the mere cramming of the receptacle of the mind. This done, the special work for the modern woman, in the curious changes of the relative condition of things, will unfold itself as she is ready for it. There, my dear, you have drawn from me a little homily on the most vexed question of the day.”

“But you say ‘the modern woman.’ Do you think women are destined for different positions and other occupations in these days from what we were meant to do in other ages of the world? Why is there all this talk about the modern woman?”

“My dear child, modern civilisation, from a

variety of causes on which we need not stop to dwell, has made very numerous a certain class among women in these latter days, whose simple existence has given birth to this expression, and to most of the ideas it implies—the woman without family ties, without definite occupations, without any strong interests or positive responsibilities appointed to her by fate. It is this woman, with her leisure and her uncultured and unused abilities, that has given all these questions existence and increasing power.”

“Yes ; exactly,” answered Donna. “And do you think it is meant to be so ? I mean, is the woman you have described pre-intended to *be* as a part in this world’s history, as it were, Madame Prioleau ; and is there a work for which she is especially created, and that, if she were only trained to do it, she is meant to do ? ”

“Undoubtedly I do think so, my child. As the world and its civilization goes rapidly on, work is increasing and will increase, which we want a certain and special class of persons to do. As civilisation produces the requirement, so civilisation, by many causes, supplies the need. The work is specially a woman’s work : the harvest is increasing quickly ; the destined labourers stand in idle crowds, weary, many of

them, of their idleness, but unfit to do anything useful in the needy world. They are there ; the work is there : education must supply the link, by throwing light upon themselves and upon their lives."

"But what are they to do, supposing all were educated ? Everybody has not got the mission, dear madame—the vocation to work among the poor."

"And all need not do it. Time will show ; time will open new spheres, new circles of usefulness, new interests every day. Let us have the higher education, by all means, and the highest—the education that embraces discipline of every faculty, training in every habit of life. What can be worse than the education of women as it now stands ? A superficial gloss in some cases, over-tasked and overstrained capacities in others, and, worse than all, the education, or the want of it, that results in an aimless and listless woman, who has not culture sufficient to give her a single strong individual pursuit or task, and who is bereft, by independence, even of the occupation of working for her bread. I pity that class of my sisters, Donna, and I would not speak hardly of them ; for, after all, it is the one to which you and *I* might have belonged."



“You, Madame Prioleau?”

“Yes, my dear child,” she answered, laughing. “You look astonished, but it is so. I have never been married. It was in Italy, among my first soldiers there, many years ago, that they took to calling me ‘madame;’ the soubriquet has stayed by me ever since, but I am as little entitled to the dignified designation as I am to the French nationality it implies. No; in American diction, I am properly Lucia Prioleau, as our friend of last night is called Catharine Proute. My dear, courteous Frenchmen in the hospital at Solferino gave me the title, just as, earlier still,—when I first came among them,—I was ‘la sœur,’ and as *now* many of them know me as ‘la mère.’ The general compromise, however, is in the abstract ‘madame,’ and I never contradict it; it seems to carry a matronly sense of authority in its sound.”

“How curious!” said Donna reflectively.

“It is so, however. I never married, though for many years of my life, as your father would tell you, as far back as when he knew me, I contemplated the step; but the American war settled, after many a year of doubting, that question, and settled it for me sadly enough.”

Madame Prioleau turned away for an instant, and her hand sought Donna’s, and she went on again—

“Do you care to hear the story? It was a long engagement. Want of money; then doubts and difficulties on both sides, but on mine, God knows, always love and constant devotion. Then a quarrel; long separation; the war, and bitter, passionate regrets that drove me to join the nursing-staff, thinking things might happen as they did. Then the fiery ordeal—my first lesson in the terrible sights of battle, bloodshed, death. And, lastly, the summer night after the skirmish of Fort Rupert, where I found him, far beyond the lights of the camp, wounded on the battlefield—almost dead. I sat by him that long night; I carried water to him, and many round him; and when the morning broke over us, and the ambulance-waggon came round, *he* had sunk away, from pain and restlessness, from suffering and sin, and lay dead, I sitting there in solitude beside him, and dead and dying soldiers close around. They bore him from me, but I could not leave the field. I lost my life’s love there: I found a love that is stronger than life itself. I found my mission. In scenes like that where *he* died, in soothing wounded, suffering soldiers struck down like him,—I have found there was still left a life, for which I could endure mine. So you see I am not in the least an

exceptional woman after all, Donna. I have had my own individual selfish life and love, like others, and it had to be wrested from me before I could yield myself to universal interest and abstract human good. I have been rewarded far more than I deserve," she added, "in the complete consolation with which my profession has become—myself."

"You could never have been selfish."

"Yes, I was; I was often selfish : I am now. My profession is myself, I say, and I am often greedily selfish in thinking and talking only of it, as I do at this moment, dear. Ah ! did I not say you were curiously interesting and sympathetic to me ? and you prove it by the most perfect art ; you draw me to talk, and of myself, to you, and all the time I keep fancying you are come to talk of yourself to me."

"I like hearing you talk ; but, madame, my life has been so common-place, I have so little to tell."

"But about education, as we were saying, dear, do not fear yours will be useless ; do not fear it will be thrown away. Study has already made you what you are, Donna, and time will certainly show you what you are destined to do."

"But the worst is, that often I do not think I

want to do anything. I have no ambition now, though as a very young girl I once had. I do not care to be exceptional, distinguished, or great ; I want only——”

“What, my child ?”

“I want to make others do it. I want to see lives I know, and see about me, what they ought to be. I do not care about my own at all ; I could do so little. I never feel destined to achieve great things ; but, oh, I know people who could, and I know it better now I have seen more of the world. If I could only see them, and make them do it !”

“What kind of people ?”

“Oh, I can scarcely explain to you. But, Madame Prioleau, what do *you* think ? Does it not seem to you that a life that has had high ideals and great aspirations, and good, genuine, beautiful thoughts about things, even if it does go in a wrong way and makes every kind of mistake for years, must be nobler than the sort of lives I see people leading here in London, going all straight and happily for themselves ?”

“My dear child, whatever is good and genuine and great, as you express it, in ideal and aspiration must constitute nobility in a heart, and produce it in a life.”

"It will, at last, I know ; it must go right—it must."

"I do not see how it can go wrong."

"Yes, it can ; very wrong. There may be mistakes and false conceptions ; there are, I know. But, dear Madame Prioleau, if you had ever seen a high ideal of this kind, could you ever care for, could you ever descend, I mean, to anything lower ?"

"Do you mean to any lower type of person ?"

"Yes ; that is one of the puzzling things in my life that I want to ask you about."

"Are you talking in the abstract of an imaginative ideal, or of an individual ? I scarcely understand you."

"I dare say not. I can scarcely tell sometimes myself ; it is so long ago. But, madame, I know I am selfish. I try to be abstract and universal, as you say, in my interest ; but I cannot. And yet *it* is taken from me, quite as much as from you,—I mean, my ideal. And it has not made me unselfish, as it has you ; but I cannot, I cannot cease to think about—*him*, or to wish he would come right."

"Tell me more," said madame, in her sweet caressing voice ; and she put her arm round the girl, and drew her close to her ; and Donna, who

had been wont to have Gaie and all round her lean on her quiet strength, and to keep her hidden heartache in silence to herself, turned gladly to Madame Prioleau, with the happy, reposeful sense of perfect confidence, and went on.

“It was long, long ago, you know. It began when I was quite a child. We were so lonely at the Old Towers; and from the first time Piers came it made such a difference, and we did everything together. Gaie was so much younger than I; and the more he came, and the older we both grew, we seemed more and more to be so happy. He taught me everything,—to care for everything, I mean. It always seems to me he gave me the key to all that became myself. And then, at last, six years ago, he went away, and things seemed all to go wrong in his character; and papa heard those dreadful stories about him, and we may not even speak of him now. And it seems so terrible. He used to be so good and noble; and I thought he would become so useful and great. But it has all gone wrong, and now I do not care for my life in the least. Why should I try to be anything such as women call great and exceptional, while everything is so wrong with him? I try to devote myself, and I try to be interested and study and work; but I am

always thinking of him, and wondering where he is, and what he is doing with his life. And then I think, what a poor thing at best my career must be ; and how great and noble his might have been, with his talent and his power. I should have been so proud of him, if he had stayed with us and let me always be his friend. He used to say I helped him. Ah ! you see, dear madame, how selfish and individual *I* am."

Madame Prioleau smoothed the glossy head with her firm, gentle hand. She was thinking of that dark face on the door-step, as she drove away from Laburnum Sweep the night before, and feeling it was fortunate for the gradual development of this little romance that she was bound to silence. But she felt happy and full of hope for this true-hearted girl, whose thoughtful, earnest character had filled her with so much interest. The sensitive nature seemed certainly of an organization too delicate, and much too fragile and sympathetic, to be destined for the rôle of the woman exceptional and self-dependent. She knew enough of a woman's heart to realise this, and she felt glad that there was probably a different future in store for Donna now.

"And then, madame," Donna added, "when

I have once known such a character, and it has become one's ideal, should I ever strive to expel it from my memory, and to reconcile myself to a lower standard? Should we not be faithful to what has seemed to us the highest?"

"Certainly," said Madame Prioleau; though perhaps, save for that last ten minutes the night before at Mrs. Sarcroft's, she would not have expressed herself so emphatically or so unreservedly on this question of fidelity to a past ideal. But Piers's words and manner were still in her memory, and she had already heard the rumour of Sir Robert Carre. So she repeated with a clear conscience and earnest decision, "Yes, yes, beyond everything be faithful to your best ideal."

"I am so glad you say so," said Donna.

"But," continued madame, as Donna rose to leave, "dear child, trust in your future still. You are young and bright; and God grant it may bloom for you in full richness of blessing. And if it should be so, let me say a word in reference to the subject in which our conversation began. Remember, even as you would continue to do if your own life remained as it is now—remember always, with every power of influence you may ever possess, this question of the cause of women;



consider it from all the many-sided aspects in which it must be seen."

"I will study the question more, madame. But I have been selfishly indifferent, simply, I suppose, because it did not seem to bear upon my own case. I see it in a different light now; we *ought* to concern ourselves more keenly in whatever in government touches the interests of the humbler and unprotected individuals of our sex."

"Exactly; that is the light in which the question should be viewed. Provided we can be convinced, that the protection of woman, her property, her interests of every kind, and especially her well-being as an isolated and feeble member of the community, can be advanced by the existence of woman's suffrage, then the cause should have the best efforts of our life. But, as I said, I am obliged to confess I am not quite convinced in my own mind on the subject yet. I seem to see other means by which women may do much for each other, and still preserve something of our old chivalrous ideal,—womanhood, with her gentle attributes,—man caring strongly for her concerns. But that may be all sentiment. We shall see."

"I shall think a great deal about it," said Donna.

"Do not forget it at all events, my dear, how-

ever much circumstances may alter in your own life. I am afraid the indifference and selfishness of the domestic woman is sometimes as great an evil as the uneducated inability of the independent. Woman has a higher power through influence, in these days, than has ever been committed to her in the most chivalrous and poetic ages of the world; so much so that the view we take *naturally* is that a man is swayed in his most important decisions, and receives the decided bias of his character, from feminine influence in the different relations of domestic life. Through brothers, fathers, husbands, and sons, how much might women *do*, and how little do they *care*! Will you remember this, Donna: if your heart is ever quite full with the richness of your own life, and your interests do not seem to have a single empty corner in their whole range, will you remember this little last homily, if power is ever entrusted to you? I am convinced, even in this unromantic generation, that this is the course through which a true and efficient interest in the woman-question may be won. You will not forget?"

"I will not, I will not, dear madame. But I am not going to marry any one: I am going to be faithful to my—first ideal."

“Ah, well, we shall see about that.”

“I am sure of it,” said Donna. “Before I came to you this evening, I had a feeling that I was weary of the struggle with my own life; I was weary of keeping up my own standard, tired of my efforts to be universal in my interests, tired of cherishing an old vain dream; and I had thought it was better perhaps to accept fate as it came to me, and to cease trying to be anything different from just what other people about me are satisfied to be. I began to think, madame, I could manage to fill my heart with what wealth or position or worldly things could give me, if I could only get rid of theories and that old individual ideal. But I will not do it now, madame. I feel quite strongly again that there is a higher life; and I will try to get rid of my own dreamy and tiresome self.”

“Do not commit the error, dear child, of thinking that education should produce the extinction of individual character in a woman, shaping her according to a given mould. That is one of the fallacies that result in the typical strong-minded woman of these modern days. We *want* to keep her, loving, full of warm affection, and naturally companionable as Heaven has made her. We want to crush nothing—to keep

all; we want only to cultivate a higher nature built upon the foundations of woman as she is. When we have done this, and when we do *do it*,—for the cases are not few even now,—we reach the woman we want in this generation—a being cultivated and trained to the full use and possession of her own faculties, a heart tender and sensitive, with sympathies universal, a life in which circumstances have provided the leisure and the absence of private responsibilities such a woman requires—one, to describe a little further, who has looked her own nature in the face, and, recognising it with all its depth, tenderness, and susceptibility, does not crush or harden it, but with cheerful, intelligent, and active devotion gives it in all its fulness away. Thank God, there are many such women in the world already: we want many more. You know Keble's lines—

“Those happy spirits, marked by God and man,  
Their messages of love and pity bear,  
Hoping themselves in heaven's eternal home  
The genial wreath of homely love to wear.

“Sweet thoughts are theirs; they breathe divinest calm,  
Of holy offerings once in sorrow paid,  
Of fires from heaven to consecrate their alms,  
Of passion conquered on God's altar laid.”

“Dear Madame Prioleau, I am sure you are one,” murmured Donna, as she bent forward to

touch her lips in farewell to the pale cheek, on which a flush of soft colour glowed with enthusiasm now."

"Dear young friend, I try to practise, or I could not dare to preach."

"Will you teach me, madame? Will you let me come to you often? Will you—will you try to let me make my life like yours?"

"Dearest child, we know, none of us, what may lie before you in this bright young life of yours. God grant it may be every blessing. And now, good-bye. I hope to see your father to-morrow."

### CHAPTER III.

“The seas are quiet when the winds give o’er,  
So calm are we when passions are no more;  
Stronger by weakness wiser men become,  
As time recalling, lo! they wander home.”

EDMUND WALLER.

SIR JOHN GRAEME had an excellent habit of walking home every afternoon towards tea-time, nearly the whole way from Westminster. He generally took a hansom to St. James’s, and then walked across the Green Park, out at the Duke’s Corner, and along by the Knightsbridge Barracks to his house in Prince’s Gate. It was a long walk, certainly; but he said it did him good—it preserved on his bronzed cheek that ruddy glow that always suggested much more strongly the months he spent in deer-stalking at the Old Towers than any association with the grimy precincts of Westminster Abbey.

Sir John was still the picture of a handsome, vigorous old Scotchman, sound as a bell in body

as in mind. It was a fine sight to see him walking along on these dusky afternoons, with his firm, springy step, his head erect, his eye full of thought, his mouth expressing at once sweetness and determination of character.

This afternoon he was rather late. The lamps were already lit all round the lower region of the river, glittering strangely through the fog beyond Buckingham and in a starry circle round the Green Park. All along Piccadilly, where the fog was falling dense and smoky, the flaring gas-lamps were struggling to live in the murky atmosphere, and the noisy crush of traffic was hurrying to and fro.

"I hope both the girls are at home," was his reflection as he paused for a crossing at the top of Piccadilly, and looked up and down through the smoke and mist.

A moment, and the noisy incessant stream of waggons, carriages, cabs, and hansom's coming in every one of the four directions, was arrested by the stentorian voice of the policeman ringing with peremptory authority through the fog, and Sir John stepped firmly and rapidly across. He reached the corner. There was a blaze of light here from the lamps over the gateway, and from the entrance to Apsley House; and there was a

stream incessant of foot-passengers hurrying rapidly along. Sir John was impatient; he pushed forward, and, with an exclamation of mingled apology and disgust, he fell right against a man head and shoulders taller than himself—a young man, who paused instantly, held out his arms to prevent Sir John flattening his nose upon the pavement, and murmured some words in responsive apology to the unfortunate baronet's ejaculatory remarks.

They both paused. Sir John looked up; the brilliant lamp-light from above the archway streamed right upon the younger man's face. Sir John started.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "Piers Ashton—my dear boy!" and, with both hands extended, Sir John forgot his impatience and sprang forward again.

Piers seized his hands in both of his. He drew him aside a little just under the lamp-light out of the crowd, and they stood a second silent, their hands clasped warmly together, each pair of eyes searching eagerly the other's face. Some one else followed them also out of the stream of people, and stood silent, a little backward by Piers Ashton's side; another figure, young also, slight and agile-looking, about half Piers's breadth and height.



“My dear boy,” Sir John continued, “I am delighted to see you !

(“Deuce take Lady Curzon Kellam !” he mentally exclaimed ; “there is not a shadow of harm in that face.)

“God bless you, my dear boy !” he continued aloud. “I am uncommonly glad to see you again.”

Piers’s grave gaze of inquiry lit up at once.

“And I am delighted to see you,” he said. “I have been hunting for you down at Westminster the whole day long.”

“You have ? Gad ! and I have been shut up in those fusty committee-rooms since eleven o’clock.”

“So they told me ; and I would not disturb you. Then I heard that you lived in Prince’s Gate, and I was going along to try my luck at finding you there.”

“Capital ! Then come away with me now : I am going straight home,” Sir John answered with delighted eagerness ; for in his warm heart real affection for Piers had flooded already every recollection of suspicion or offence. “Come along ;” and he loosed Piers’s hand to lay his own upon his arm.

“But stop a moment,” said Piers, suddenly remembering his companion—“stop ; first let me introduce to you my friend. Victor, this is Sir

John Graeme. Uncle, this is my best friend—my dearest friend in the world; I am sure you will like to know him.”

Victor moved forward, and Sir John turned hastily round. A cloud had come over his face, and his lips contracted now with angry memories and suspicions. This was one of those confounded Frenchmen, full of every kind of dangerous, devilish mischief, who had ruined all Piers Ashton’s career for him, and taken him to the bad.

Sir John turned stiffly round; he looked up, and there,—just under the cluster of flaming lights, he saw that fair winning face, the light curling hair falling over his forehead as he removed his hat, the blue eyes sparkling in glad sympathies for his friend, his lips parted in a smile, earnest, deferential and radiant, full of that wonderful sweetness that was Victor’s irresistible charm.

Sir John looked up, and was silent a moment. The young man stood also silent, waiting for the elder to speak, bending still before him his uncovered head.

“Gad!” said Sir John at length, as he put his hand out, “you are *never* a Frenchman.”

By which he testified that the prejudices of an elderly British are much the same as the pre-

judices of a young British mind, such as showed themselves at Cambridge in Piers Ashton seven years ago—the same, a little more obstinate and intensified.

“You are never a Frenchman!”

“Only half,” said Victor, laughing, as he took Sir John Graeme’s hand.

“Half?”

“Yes,” he answered again; “my mother was a Scotchwoman.”

“God bless me! Stop,—let me look at you again. I knew it—I knew it; here, turn to the lamp-light. I’ll bet a sovereign these are Campbell features, and a pair of blue Campbell eyes.”

“I suppose they are,” Victor went on with a bright smile again. “My mother was a Campbell of Ardsachy: perhaps you may know the name. My grandfather sold his property, and went to live at Fontainebleau about the year thirty-five.”

“Of course, I knew it—I knew it—I remember perfectly. Why, Piers, Ardsachy Castle is not forty miles from the Old Towers. I remember your family distinctly. I warmed in a moment to that yellow hair and those Scotch blue eyes. There is not a bit of a Frenchman about you.”

“A little, I hope,” said Lescar, laughing again

at the enthusiasm of Sir John's national prejudice.

“You hope so ! What nonsense !—a man who can claim to the old blood of the Campbells of Ardsachy, my boy, need not go harking back to any French ancestors ; I can tell you that. Come along ; do not let us stand here. Come home with me at once. The girls are sure to be snug over their tea, you know, Piers ; and Lady Kellam has gone to blow off the cobwebs at Brighton to-night—so it is capital. Come along.”

And he turned round energetically, and walked between them, taking an arm of each.

Piers stopped him at the corner, however, before they passed beyond the influence of the cluster of lights.

“Wait a moment, sir—just one moment : please look at these.”

And he drew a couple of letters from his pocket.

“Will you believe me when I say that I only received them into my hands last Saturday. They have lain for me three years at the hotel in Paris.”

“My dear boy, I understand—I understand. It is all right, Piers. I believe in you ; I believe in you, my boy. I cannot look in your face and

remember one of these confounded stories of——  
Bother! I must not mention names. But put  
up the letters. You will tell me all about it by-  
and-by; and evil reports and reporters may go to  
the devil. Come home with me, both of you :  
we will have a cup of tea with my two little  
girls, and have all the news out together. Donna  
will be glad to see you.

## CHAPTER IV.

“ You that think love can convey,  
No other way,  
But through the eyes, into the heart  
His fatal dart ;  
Close up their casements, and but hear  
This syren sing,  
And on the wing  
Of her sweet voice it shall appear  
That love can enter at the ear.”

THOMAS CAREW.

THE girls were both at home by this time, as their father had hoped in his mental soliloquy at Hyde Park Corner, when he looked east and west into the gathering fog.

Donna had driven straight back in their little brougham from Madame Prioleau's, and had come into the drawing-room to find Gaie seated in solitude on the rug, the tea-urn fizzing on the round table beside her, the room lighted by a warm glow from the huge fire, and Gaie indulging in that old wicked habit of her childhood—reading in the pleasant twilight, by nothing brighter than the

flickering flames that danced merrily over her and over the pretty hangings of the room.

Donna had come in, had thrown aside her bonnet, and had sat down on her low favourite chair ; and Gaie had nestled close to her, with her head upon her sister's lap, and they sat thus a long time.

Donna had wonderful things to tell Gaie of the visit of that afternoon—of Madame Prioleau and the sweet tenderness and sublime nobility of her character—of all the new thoughts and resolutions and grand schemes that had arisen in her mind as she listened to madame, and as she drove home in solitude and dark.

And Gaie had heard, and answered, and sympathized,—her book lying neglected beside her, while her eyes became shadowy and full of dreamy thought as she gazed into the firelight, and the dancing reflection glistened and quivered in their beautiful violet depths. Then Gaie had sighed, as Donna's words seemed to sound the misty, abstract, infinite difficulties of her own mind, and as the visions of a distance, great and sublime, flitted before her with a strange mystery of unknown possibilities and with suggestions of a future all unrevealed.

“ Ah ! Donna,” she sighed, “ I wish I were half as good as Madame Prioleau and you.”

“My darling—*you!*” said Donna; and the answer, in the tender quiver of her voice, found no further expression in words; her fingers wandered quietly through the wavy “burnished gold,” as Lady Kellam had called it, of Gaie’s hair—“my darling.”

They sank into silence then. These inspirations of Madame Prioleau seemed to touch within them a sphere of thought too mystic, too indefinite, to be expressed in words.

They sat on, and, presently, while Donna’s thoughts followed their wonted habits, and unravelled themselves in silent energy, becoming gradually definite and clear, Gaie broke into her own method of reflection, as she always described it, and in a full, soft voice she began to sing. Donna listened: she always said Gaie’s music helped her to think; she always declared Gaie’s voice had a special language of its own in song. She listened, and Gaie sang on.

Suddenly there was a sound in the hall, downstairs, the opening of the front door, and a loud bang as it swung back again. She paused an instant.

“Papa,” Donna said: “he has come in with his latch-key.”

And Gaie went on. Her father would be up



here directly, she knew ; but for him she need not still her song : it was,—next to the individuals, Donna and Gaie,—perhaps the thing he loved best on earth. She sang on, her voice swelling as she raised her head, the notes floating through the room and beyond it.

Suddenly she paused again. Her quick ear caught an unusual sound. Her father was speaking ; and as he came up the softly carpeted stairs, there were voices mingling with his. She stopped, sprang to her feet, and glanced rapidly in inquiry and astonishment at Donna, as her father, followed by two unexpected visitors, entered the room.

“ Ah ! ” Sir John exclaimed. Donna, sitting on her low chair by the fireside, turned quickly round. “ Just as I expected,” her father was saying ; but his words were unheard. She had risen to her feet, and the blood rushed over her face and then fled from it instantly, leaving her cheek deadly and pale. But she stood quite still, and she put out both her hands ; and there was no time nor need of introduction or explanation, for Piers had sprung forward, had clasped her hands in both of his, and was looking down with an eager, earnest expression of intense feeling upon his face.

“ Donna ! ” Not another word could he say,

and there was fortunately no need, for Sir John said all the rest.

“Ha ! ha ! I thought so ; you are glad to see him again ? Sun-burnt fellow he is, isn’t he ? And here is little Gaie !” and he laughed brimful of merry gladness, as Piers turned, and with bright cordiality clasped Gaie’s little proffered hands.

“How nice,” she exclaimed instantly, “to see you again !”

“Ha ! ha !” laughed Sir John again ; “and here is somebody else, my dears, let me introduce you. This is a young countryman, a Scotchman, grandson of Campbell of Ardsachy, an old neighbour of ours : my daughters.”

“This is Victor Lescar, Donna,” Piers said in his turn ; “my friend.”

Victor smiled his sunny greeting, all the sunnier as it was in his gladness for his friend, and he shook hands with Donna. Then Gaie put her tiny fingers into his, and he held them a moment, and the smile with its merriment and radiance left his face. He paused a moment in silence ; a sweet quivering light came into his eyes as they met hers in the fire-light, and an expression quite new to him curled tenderly on his lips. He dropped her hand, said nothing ; and then he, as well as

Piers, obeyed Sir John's hearty entreaty, and they all sat down.

"Now then, Donna, my dear," the old gentleman continued, stirring up the fire, and bustling about, full of good humour and hospitality—"now then, let us have a cup of tea. I told them both we should just find you at it."

"I had my tea, two hours ago, with Madame Prioleau," said Donna, rising as her father spoke, and crossing over to her place by the little table; "but I shall be very glad to pour some out for everybody else;" and she bent over the tea-things.

"Was it not extraordinary? I had just crossed Piccadilly, and was bolting in at the corner there, and I ran right against them, straight into Piers's arms? Gad, I would have been down on my nose, if you had not caught me; and then I looked up in the gas-light, and there you were. Extraordinary!" So Sir John chattered on, while he took his cup of tea from Donna, and sat himself down in his huge chair at the other corner of the rug again.

He talked on, making conversation for everybody, which was well indeed, as no one seemed inclined to make much for themselves. And Piers answered shortly, while his guardian talked, and Donna bent her face over the tea-table, and he

looked at her, and then round the room, across at Gaie, and then back to Donna again.

What a pleasant home-like scene it was ! How long—not during all his wanderings had he seen one quite like it. The softly coloured luxuriant room, the warm fire-flames dancing over it making a glowing comfortable light ; Gaie's golden head bending opposite to him on one side ; Sir John's portly frame, so pleasant and familiar, ensconced in comfort between his daughters in his big chair ; and then at the tea-table Donna, her fingers moving quickly among the glittering china and silver on the snowy tablecloth, and her graceful figure and dark-brown head bending low, as if very intent indeed upon her occupation.

The scene touched him with a feeling of its sweet and tranquil homeliness, its English comfort, its English refinement and quiet ; and in that moment his heart had found time to contrast another scene he remembered, another face he had lately seen ; and the sense of contrast was pleasant to him.

He rose and approached Donna at last, to take Gaie's teacup from her hand ; and when he had crossed the rug with it, he returned again.

“ You have been to tea, then, with Madame Prio-leau ; eh, Donna ? ” said Sir John.

"Yes, papa."

"You did go to see Madame Prioleau then to-day," said Piers. "She told me she expected you."

"Told you? Do you know her?"

"I should think we do!" he answered. "Victor, we know Madame Prioleau a little, do we not?"

"I have known her a very long time," said Victor, speaking in a low voice, and with a curious absent manner not quite like himself.

"And I know her well, though I have not known her very long," said Piers.

"And I have known her but a very, very little while," said Donna; "but I feel as if I had known her all my life."

"Is it not curious? It is just what one does feel," said Piers, "after one single talk with Madame Prioleau."

"My old friend seems to have developed into a very charming woman," said Sir John. "I must go and see her."

"Oh yes, papa, I told her you would go to-morrow."

"You have known her, as papa has, for a long time then?" said Gaie, addressing Victor.

He had sat down near her, and his eyes were

wandering absently from the glowing fire to her face, as she leaned back in the shadow.

“Yes, since I was quite a boy,” he answered.

Then he was silent again—curiously silent and unresponsive for him.

Then Sir John said something more, and Piers and Donna turned from the tea-table and joined in his remarks; and Victor, while their tones resounded on the other side of the fire-place, bent forward and said to Gaie in a low voice, “Why did you stop singing just as we came in?”

She looked up at him with a bright amused smile.

“How do you know it was I?”

“I have not the slightest doubt of it.”

Gaie had dropped on to a low stool at the corner of the mantelpiece when they all came in, and she had sat back in the shadow; but she bent forward now into the fire-glow, leaned her soft cheek on her hand, and looked up at him with a mischievous merry light in her eyes.

“How do you know Donna does not sing?”

“I do not know that she does not sing,” he answered.

“Then how do you know it was not she who sang as you came up-stairs?”

“Because,” he replied emphatically, “I know it was you.”

“ But how can you ? ”

“ Perhaps because I sing myself,” he said with a sudden thoughtfulness. “ Can you understand these things?—I cannot. I heard your voice before my foot was on the lowest step of the stairs. Piers and Sir John were speaking to each other,” he went on in a curiously earnest tone, as if he felt the whole narrative and explanation were due to her; “ they were talking the whole time, but I do not know what they said—I never heard one word; but I heard your voice—every note of it. You were singing from the ‘ Orfeo,’ were you not—‘ Che farò senza Eurydice ’ ? And I looked round the room the instant I entered, and I knew which voice had sung. Will you not believe me ? ”

“ Well, there were not many to choose from,” she answered thoughtfully, with a gravity as curious as his own; “ you could not go very far wrong in your guess.”

“ I think,” he replied, “ I should have known it just the same, if there had been twenty instead of two people in the room.”

She did not answer again; she turned her face away a little, and looked, as he had done, into the glowing fire; and as she turned away, he rested his eyes upon her, thinking how bright she was, how

lovely. She seemed very beautiful to him, her golden hair glistening in the light, her figure bending in the shadow, her eyes full of soft wandering thought, their dark lashes falling over the delicately tinted cheek.

Victor was silent; and as he sat there, and looked at her, he realised with the quick electric sensibility of his nature—in that sweet transient moment he realised something instantly, suddenly, concerning himself and her.

“Will you sing to me again?” he asked.

“How absurd! No, I could not,” she answered, smiling. “Why they are all talking; and I never sing without accompaniment, except when Donna and I are quite alone.”

“But another time?”

“Another time, perhaps,” she continued, “if you care about it. But I dare say you yourself sing ten times better than I.”

“Oh no, a man’s singing is nothing.”

“Why, I think just the opposite. I—” she began; but Piers, overhearing their last remarks, interrupted her from the other side.

“Are you asking Victor about his singing, Gaie? Oh, you must hear him,” he said proudly; for he was anxious to show off without any delay the perfections of his beloved friend.



"I want to hear Miss Graeme again," answered Victor.

"Donna?" Piers continued inquiringly, "I did not remember that you sang."

"No; Gaie does."

"Ah!" Piers was beginning; but Victor interrupted, in his turn, with reproachful eagerness.

"Did you not hear," he exclaimed, "as we came up-stairs?"

"No," said Piers; "I did not hear any singing."

"Dear! dear!" said Victor; "imagine being born without a musical pair of ears."

"I do not think that Piers's musical susceptibilities were ever very acute," said Donna, laughing.

"Acute in the wrong direction," said Victor. "I used to make his life a burden to him at Cambridge; but, indeed, he is improved."

"The valuable influence of musical companionship, you see, Vic. Well, I will revenge myself for all the songs with which you have inflicted me during all these years, by insisting that you comply with Gaie's request and sing to us now."

"She did not request me to sing, *mon ami*: you did for her."

"At all events, we more than request now,"

said Donna. "Will you sing? We should like it so much. This, of all the hours of the day, is, in my opinion, the most suggestive of music."

"Besides, I did request you," put in Gaie; "and now, as Donna says, more than *request*—I insist."

"Do you really wish it?" he asked, turning earnestly towards her. "I want so much to hear you again. You stopped just at that last delicious change in the melody. I wish you would finish it."

"After you have sung, perhaps I may. There, do not keep us waiting," she added with a pretty little petulant assertion of dignity. "The piano is just behind the curtain hanging in that arch; you have only to push it back a little. Go."

"If you command me, I will," he said; "if you command me."

"Certainly I do."

"*Bien!*" and he rose and crossed the room to where the velvet curtain hanging over the archway separated them from the larger apartment. He pushed it back, as she had told him. Beyond was a vista of dusky shadow, the fire-glow scarcely penetrating the length of the lofty room.

"Can I help you?" said Piers, moving round in his chair.

“No; it is all right. Here is the piano in a charming twilight corner. How perfect for veiling the blushes of a modest performer!”

“But will you not light the candles?” said Donna. “Stop; I will ring.”

“No, no, please do not; I like the dark here much the best. Miss Graeme, do you know these words?” and he sat down, leaving to discretion the choice of which Miss Graeme he was addressing, and struck a few chords, improvising his accompaniment in his own favourite way.

He played a few bars softly, and then in his sweet rich tones he sang the same old words of three years ago, with which he had teased Piers so much one evening at Cambridge—

“Where and how shall I earliest meet her?  
What are the words she first shall say?  
By what name shall I learn to greet her?  
I know not now,—it will come some day.  
With the self-same sunlight shining upon her,  
Shining down on her ringlets’ sheen,  
She is standing somewhere—her whom I honour,  
She whom I wait for—my Queen, my Queen.”

He sang the whole lovely song to the same music—that same setting of his own, to which he had sung it to Piers that evening at Cambridge; and Piers listened, and remembered that long-ago night, and wondered why Victor chose to sing

that particular song on this occasion now, and what had made him remember it, for—all these years since that one evening, he had never sung it again—until now!

Then, as Victor sang on, and verse after verse came forth in his rich musical voice, and Sir John nodded his admiration, and Donna listened with a glister in her eyes, as she looked into the fire and sat with her hands lightly clasped before her, and Gaie listened with her face bent forward into the light, her flushed cheek resting still upon her hand, and her lips parted with an expression of intense musical enjoyment and appreciation, Piers watched them all with a softened look in his dark eyes and a curious stream of memories flooding over him—of himself, as he was when he last heard that song,—of the past that lay behind him then,—the future he had thought before him,—and the lesson that had reached his heart and life between that time and now.

Victor's voice ceased; a few beautiful chords followed the ring of tenderness with which he had uttered the last lines, the soft eager intonation of the words, "My Queen—my Queen," as he took his fingers from the piano, and the sound quite ceased.

"Thank you so much. No, please *do* not come back here again: we want some more," said Donna.

He laughed with a light echo of pleasure in his voice.

"I like the words," said Piers, solemnly.

"Do you?" said Victor, laughing still. "A thousand congratulations, my friend."

"I know what you mean," Piers retorted, with a touch of his old shy dislike to being rallied in his tone.

"It is the pretty poem at the beginning of that dear little book 'Trefoil,' is it not?" said Gaie. "I am so fond of all those poems."

"Yes; so I am," said Victor from the piano. "There is a sort of sympathetic ring and a suggestive vein in every one of them; but that is my favourite."

"I never heard the words sung to that music before," said Gaie.

"I dare say not," said Piers, still enthusiastically anxious to announce his friend's achievements. "You will not often find that you have heard Victor's music before."

"Do you compose?" exclaimed Gaie, clasping her hands together with delighted eagerness and admiration.

Victor was touching the notes again softly as he answered.

"Sometimes," he said in an absent tone. He was evidently searching for something in his memory again.

"Do you? and what kind of music? Always songs?" said Gaie.

"Oh dear, no," said Piers; "lots of things besides. He makes tremendously grand pieces sometimes."

"'Un peu de chaque chose et rien de tout!'" as Montaigne said of *la Française*," said Victor.

He took his fingers from the keys, and they were silent for a moment.

"Blumenthal has adapted 'My Queen,'" said Gaie. "Do you know his setting?"

"No, I do not," he answered, rising from the piano as he spoke. "But you do: it is your turn now; will you come and sing it?"

"If you like—yes; but the same words, you know."

"We cannot have them too often," he answered, as she approached him; and he pushed the curtain further back to give her more room. "And we shall have them with real music this time. I ought to apologise for inflicting my own compositions upon you."

"I liked it," Gaie said; and she sat down.

She let her fingers wander over the notes in her turn, awakening them with an intensely sympathetic touch. At the first note Victor said no more. He dropped into a seat near her in the shadow of the large darkened room, and was silent.

He listened and watched her as she sang, her beautiful notes thrilling him with a sweet mysterious power, caught from the new wonderful life that had sprung up so suddenly in his heart; her loveliness, so childlike and delicate, filling him with unspeakable tenderness, as he sat by her in the dusky room, and the soft glow from beyond the velvet curtain wrapped her figure in shadowy lights.

"That *is* music!" he said, breaking the pause that followed the song. "I am ashamed to have paraded my feebleness when that was to come. But it is strange how fond one grows of these bagatelles of one's own creation; they seem to work themselves into the tissue of one's life."

"I can quite imagine it," she answered. "It must be a perfect sensation, that power to create."

"It must be when one's creations can approach perfection," he said. "But even in its humble

‘nothingness’ it is precious to its owner,—a gift for one’s inner self. A creative power of any kind, is like a language for the soul.”

“Of course it is, and they who are utterly without it, seem to me to be spiritually dumb.”

“Which you are not,” he said, in a low voice.

“As far as composition goes, I am.”

“But perhaps we have, as theorists are so apt to do, placed too narrow a limit to our analogy of the idea. Translation is only another form of the creative voice,” he continued.

“Yes; to a certain extent, true,” she answered. “The musical spirit in all must be alive even to speak in language adopted from another creative source.”

“Yes; and to speak truthfully, to translate with any reality and force, the hidden idea so dimly shadowed to the unappreciative in the highest class of music, the music-nature must be not only alive, but keenly sensitive, exquisitely sympathetic, and quickly reflective; and as these are essentially feminine qualities, I have a favourite theory that women are the best translators, while men are the strongest creators of musical thought.”

“A flattering conclusion for us,” she said in a



soft and pleased tone. "You encourage me in my heroic efforts to penetrate and reproduce what to most people, as you say, are most untranslatable thoughts."

"I am sure you do not need encouragement." he went on. "But it is part of my favourite idea of the perfection with which the analogies of things penetrate the whole range of material, spiritual, intellectual, or artistic existence. I do not want to bore you with a philosophical dissertation and—I beg your pardon for suggesting anybody so unromantic as Thomas Buckle to a lady, but——"

"Why should you? I have tried to read him, and I know it is only my own idiocy that I cannot. Donna knows all about him, I assure you. But tell me what you were going to say. I am always grateful to any one who tries to make *me* a little wiser."

"Well, then, it was on the subject of philosophy, the recollection of the analogy of the thought with what we have just been saying occurred to me. Will it bore you?—will you care to hear?"

"Go on," said Gaie.

"You know, he is the only person who has ever done your sex full justice on the score of intel-

lectual powers by admitting the use you have been to the true balance of the schools of philosophy."

"Yes; I feel grateful to him! Go on. How pleased Donna will be; I must tell her. Oh, she and Piers and papa are deep in something; so you must say it all to me, and I will remember it for her."

"Well, you see, it is not published in his great book, so perhaps she may not know it. But I am sure the idea will come out when some one brings his private papers to light. It was in a lecture at the Royal Institution in '58 he said it all, and I came upon it in the file of *Fraser's Magazine* at Cambridge years ago. He says we owe to women, to their brilliant imagination, the rapidity of their perception, and the clearness of their grasp of a deductive idea, the immense service that has been rendered to philosophic science by keeping alive a school of deductive thought. You see, ever since the age of Bacon the tendency of all scientific men has been towards a purely inductive philosophy; and in philosophy, as in everything, but for you, we should have lost sight long ago of the more beautiful, the idealistic, and imaginative spheres of ourselves."

"That is very pleasant," said Gaie, "but it

is very difficult. Bacon—inductive, deductive. Oh, I wish it were Donna instead of me !”

“There ! I knew I should bore you.”

“No, you have not,” she said ; “it is very nice. Then you think Donna is quite right when she says we might be philosophers if we liked ?”

“Yes, certainly I do. The mental organization of a woman is so constituted that, were she adequately trained, the rapidity of the theorizing faculties of her mind and the vivid clearness of her imagination would enable her to fill a distinct position in the advancement of science and philosophy.”

“That is just it. Donna always persists that a woman, if she were only characteristically great enough, has a distinct mission she might fulfil for the world in this line.”

“And Miss Graeme is quite right. But these ideas were spoken by Buckle twelve years ago ; and women have not begun widely to appreciate their philosophic faculties as yet.”

“Or you to appreciate them in us,” she answered, laughing.

“I appreciate the thought best in its analogical sense,” he said ; “it is so exactly the picture of what we want from you, for everything in our lives or in our minds.”

"To beautify your dreary science and philosophy?" she said, laughing again; "to appreciate and translate your music; to——"

"Do not laugh," he said; "it is quite true, we do want you to beautify everything that the rude touch of man makes dreary and unbeauteous, if left to labour alone. We want you in everything—in science, in philosophy, in art; we want you to do all the great part of appreciative reflection, of delicate colouring; and as to translating, we have to wait for you, to translate us to—ourselves!"

"That is all very charming," she answered; "but we are getting very deep. Will you not sing to me again?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

And he rose: she took his place; and again he took hers at the piano, and sang. He chanted, this time, to his own music, one after another—Julian Fane's beautiful translations of Heine's little tender love-songs; exquisite little vignette settings they are, of the flowers, the birds, the sunshine, of the beauty of summer, of the ripple of water, and the smiles of love. All Gaie's musical sympathies were captivated as he sang on. Then she sang to him again; then they chattered once more, like two young happy twittering birds; then he must play "this one little

bit," and she must let him hear "just an idea of that," and, "yes, she knew *this* song, he must just sing the first verse;" and he had "often heard of the next" one she mentioned, and he must have it—he "knew it would suit her voice;" and so they went on through a pleasant hour—singing, playing, murmuring in soft voices to each other in that mysterious companionship of two musical natures—an intense enjoyment, at which we, perhaps the not musically gifted parts of the human community, often look wonderingly on, as at intercourse of an unknown language, the mingling of an unknown life,—look on, with wonder, not unmingled with envy. A bond of sympathy in this strange humanity of ours is such a perfectly delightful thing. Perhaps music is, of all, the most delightful; certainly it develops the most rapidly into life.

Meanwhile Sir John and Piers and Donna chatted pleasantly together by the fireside, leaving the two musical enthusiasts to the enjoyment of each other and of themselves.

By the fireside, as by the piano, everybody found it very pleasant. Sir John left his letters unopened, and never rang for his lamp; he contented himself by replenishing the fire with energetic enthusiasm from time to time, keeping

up that continuous cheery blaze; and he sat, with his toes extended in front of it, and listened with genuine satisfaction to the intelligent answers and graphic descriptions which Piers Ashton was ready to give him, in answer to his many inquiries, upon many countries and many things.

They all enjoyed the long quiet talk; and everybody was sorry when there rang forth from the clock on the mantelpiece the knell of seven, and the dressing-gong sounded through the house.

"'Gad!" said Sir John, springing up, "I forgot the hour. Of course, you will both stay to dinner?"

"Impossible, I fear," Piers said.

And then the music ceased suddenly at the sound of the gong; and Victor and Gaie came forward from the shadowy duskiness of the other room.

"Victor, can we stay?"

"Thank you," said Victor, looking wistfully at Sir John, "I should like it so very much; but, I fear, this evening we cannot. We have already an engagement."

"Well, well; all right. Just as it suits yourselves. Let me see, Donna; are we going anywhere to-morrow?"

“Sir Robert Carre and Aunt Kellam dine here, papa.”

“Do they?—the deuce! Well, that will do, though; we will all be at home. You will come and dine to-morrow, then, both of you; eh?”

“With pleasure,” said Victor readily.

“I should like it immensely,” said Piers.

“Very well; that will do capitally. I shall enjoy hearing some more of your traveller’s tales, Piers. You have made good use, my boy, of your eyes and ears. Good-bye, then, till to-morrow.”

Victor had Gaie’s fingers between his for an instant—and, remembering he was in England, resisted his Frenchman’s instinct to raise them to his lips. And Donna shook hands with Piers, she feeling still more than half in a dream, as his strong clasp closed over hers with eager warmth, and his dark eyes, full of earnest expression, sought her face.

They had exchanged very few words. Sir John had been the chief talker, as was often his wont during their interviews; and his conversation had consisted chiefly in a string of inquiries bearing directly upon Piers’s travels and his life.

## CHAPTER V.

“What constitutes a State?  
Not high-raised battlement or laboured mound.  
\* \* \* \* \*  
No: men—high-minded men,  
With powers as far above brute beasts endued,  
As beasts excel cold rocks and brambles rude—  
\* \* \* \* \*  
Men who their duties know;  
But know their rights, and, knowing, dare maintain;  
\* \* \* \* \*  
And Sovereign Law, that with collected will  
O’er thrones and globes elate  
Sits empress, crowning good, suppressing ill;—  
These constitute a State.”

SIR WILLIAM JONES.

It had been a curious wandering life during these three years since the two friends had left Paris. The mission they had undertaken led them to strange corners of the world. The experiences they encountered gave them many a lesson in life.

Idealism, and abstract, unpractical theories of government in political and social affairs, received many a shock through the years spent in



America; and the effect of visionary organization in the ruling of human affairs became clear, painfully clear, mid the disillusionising surroundings of their actual existence. Vision ruling reality became a hideous caricature to their painfully awakening minds.

So much, at all events, for visionary social reformations. Reformation, in its political aspect, had still some excitement and fascination,—especially in France; and Victor, at least, by his nationality and his publicly assumed position in the perplexing national troubles of the day, was committed by all the bonds of fidelity to his old party for weal or for woe.

His party had become a strong party now. They were the turbulent and intensely excited centre of the violent agitation and bitter controversies that were racking at this time the tottering constitution of France.

When the two friends had returned from their distant wanderings, and passed through Paris, they found all their old friends in a maddened frenzy of excitement over that famous and pregnant catastrophe in the history of the Napoleons—the death of the journalist, Victor Noir, and the trial of Pierre Buonaparte.

In the Place St. Etienne they had found a

whirlpool of violent speech, which it was impossible to regard otherwise than with repugnance and with contempt. Enthusiasm, bereft of reason, of moderation, and of all power of judgment, had already become the raving fanaticism of fools.

Poor Henri Tolberg spoke now in strains less deserving of St. Pélagie than suggestive of the *maison de santé*. Raoul was looking on in grim exultation, full of sinister and subtle intent. Bouchet indeed was usually in prison; and the American Fenian, General Chauserette, by way of a sedative companion, was usually there along with him.

Paris seemed to tremble in these days with strange vibrations, such as shake Vesuvius from its summit to its base at those ominous times before its terrible outbreaks, when the sky is heavy and threatening, and the lurid air laden with horrors to come.

The times were ominous; the future unknown.

And there in the Place St. Etienne was Faustine, fanning with frantic persistency these dangerous fires, her beauty still glorious, her eyes still dark and flashing, her form still graceful as a classic statue, as an Eastern queen.

But, strange to say, to men other than these

wild agitators who formed her court, her attractions were now almost gone. Those occasional gleams of sweetness, that once made her eyes bewitching, had given place entirely to angry flashes, speaking the dark side of her character and the bitterness of her heart. There was no softness in her voice now, save towards the old grandfather, no tenderness in her spirit or on her tongue.

Faustine—the wild daughter of the Marseillaise—she inspired still admiration, wonder, almost awe. But when Piers came to Paris and saw her again, he felt the lesson her grand beauty had once taught his heart concerning its own existence was a lesson of the past; from her it could never be learnt again. The idealistic beautiful sphere, which Victor in his chivalrous dreams had taught him to ascribe to woman, found no longer its realisation in the presence of Faustine; and the old boyish passionate admiration for her had no existence in his matured character now. His judgment, his taste, revolted alike from her conduct and her use of power.

He turned his steps gladly from Paris when Victor received the mission to the London centre, and he obeyed at length with a feeling of intense pleasure the strong impulse that had been long

existing in his heart—the wish to return home. He was Faustine's plighted friend, he told himself, *for ever*, should she require him ; but, meantime, he must go home to England, to Pollingworth, to old associations and to old kind friends. Paris seemed no longer the place for him. Indeed, all Paris was in a strange and mysterious state.

How little men thought in these days—how much—of what described “ Paris ” emanated from London !

How little men knew of such scenes as that to which the duties of their mission led Victor, and Piers with him, a few hours later on that same evening, of which they had spent the beginning so pleasantly in Prince's Gate !

Perhaps Sir John would not have treated this prodigal Bohemian ward of his with so much leniency, had he possessed the remotest notion of the nature of that engagement to which the two young men were bound,—could he have seen Piers, and realised the society in which he was seated,—could he have believed his eyes when the sunny, smiling troubadour, Victor, rose in that assembly to speak.

It is true, there is a corner in London where they have much to answer for, in the troubles of

France. There were groups of dark-faced men in those days in these grimy precincts of Leicester Square, Holborn, and Percy Street, Soho, from whom the centres of the *Route du Chêne* in Geneva and the *Rue de Gravilliers* in Paris drew much of their strength and encouragement.

There were there—the old republican exiles whom Fribourg has called “the fathers of Jacobinism.” They looked with disdain on all Universalists as on teachers of mere visionary enthusiasm.

There were there—the English malcontents, of every colour.

There were the German master-minds,—Karl Frank, grim, observant, silent ; sometimes Lind Reirigrath and others. There was excitement, kindling and effective, but, among these latter names, always careful and circumspect.

There were words spoken, and schemes broached, whose fruits have since ripened and cast seed. M. Jacque’s coffee-house, the Golden Ball of Percy Street, Soho, was the scene, at this time, of the hatching of many a dark plot.

What philanthropy or real patriotism had to do with the work of such councils of evil it is difficult to conceive. And yet, how many men (and Piers Ashton still among them) clung, spite all

experimental teaching, to the old delusive dream—still cherished the deceiving thought that in government reforms, such as *these* men could suggest or contemplate, such as they could ever possibly achieve, lay improvement, the good of the multitude, the glory of nations or of the human race.

The mind wearies, as we turn again and again to reiterate the doctrines, false and delusive, of these dreamers, these writers of fiery articles, and speakers of fiery speech; as we trace again the theories of the Socialist, the Republican, the Universalist, the Reformer,—as they were all represented in the gatherings in Percy Street, Soho.

There, in these days, amid the reeking odours of tobacco-smoke and brandy, dark-bearded faces bent nightly in noisy excited conclave over maps of Paris, over plans for her fortification, over schemes for her barricades. There the voices of many nations mingled ominously—a motley throng; orations were delivered, arguments and controversies ceaseless, and all for—the Cause—the mysterious Cause which men clothed in great sounding words, and called by heroic names, and excited each other to imagine was the cause of Liberty and the cause of Truth.

There was some excuse, perhaps, for these exiles. They were often maddened by that passionate love and longing for home and country which, as Sidney expresses it, "dims the vision, and distorts the brain."

There was something to be said for the Germans, who had abandoned all sense of Fatherland, who had embraced really the cosmopolitan nationality they preached; to whom their own strange Socialistic theories had become dearer than country, nation, or home; who had renounced patriotic sentiment, and were avowedly abstract and universal in their philosophy and their schemes.

But for the Englishmen in that room—? that they were blind, confused, and deluded, as Piers Ashton had been, is the best that can be said in their defence; and this would be said hopefully, and said in confidence—were they really nerved with philanthropic zeal—really eager for human good,—were there Frederick Thessullsons among them, ready to pour out their lives in national causes truly useful—ready to give their energies and to forget—*themselves*. Were there indeed any *such heroes* among them, we should not fear for them, or—for our country through their deeds.

Would that men did agitate to talk of these things: would that there were many brave, earnest and devoted,—revolutionists against some conditions that *be*—men young and vigorous to come to the front as politicians, as philanthropists, strong in their heroic love of their nation and their fellow-men! We want men like these; we want pioneers to the depths of our darkness—pioneers through the tangled mazes of political and social truth.

But we want them genuine; we want them unselfish, sober, and dealers with facts—not dreamers of dreams. We want, certainly, agitators: apathy is our deadliest foe.

“Why troublest thou the night with thy cries?” said the gods to Prometheus.

“Why stir up the people to discontent?” is the answer often to the platform, the pulpit, or the press.

Let the night be troubled, for it is night; let the darkness be rent with cries for the day, and let philanthropists agitate till more, and far more, is done to help our fellow-man. In all things, let us advance, let us reform, let us agitate, but—in truth.

Among the many false theories, is there none true? There is so much delusion, so much empty



theory, impracticable and useless, the mind turns wearily from all this futile Utopianism, and refuses to trace it again.

It is much pleasanter now to miss over that noisy night in Percy Street, to leave Piers to relate his impressions of its experience presently to a sympathetic ear, to let him describe at the same time the events of the next morning and afternoon, and to turn to the twilight hour before dinner, when he and Victor found themselves again in the drawing-room at Princes Gate.

## CHAPTER VI.

“ We have cherished fair hopes, we have plotted fair schemes ;  
We have lived till we find them illusive as dreams.  
They have melted like snow in the grasp of the hand,  
And the steps we have climbed have departed like sand.  
Yet shall we despond, while of youth unbereft,  
And while honour, bright honour, and freedom are left ?”

EPES SARGENT.

As the two friends were shown into the room, they realised that there were additions to the fireside party since the night before, and that Donna and Gaie were attired in evening dress—Gaie in some white material, in which she looked more like a May rose than ever, and Donna in the soft shady colour that suited her so well.

A large portentous lady sat on one side, arrayed with much magnificence in a gown and decorations evidently beyond the requirement of the present occasion. Lady Kellam had more than one evening engagement, and was “going on.”

She returned Piers and Victor’s obeisance, on

their introduction, with some reserve. She turned her back on Victor immediately; but she surveyed Piers with a critical and considerate eye.

"How do you do, Mr. Ashton? I ought to know you, I think. I remember your poor father well."

She gave him the tips of two fingers, and watched him still, while Sir John wheeled him round by a hand on his shoulder, and presented him to Sir Robert Carre.

"Ah, come back from your travels? Had enough of it, eh?" said Sir Robert, as he shook hands with the young man, and put up his eye-glass to stare into the dark face.

"I do not know," said Piers. "Travelling about the world is an occupation more apt to grow upon a man than to tire him out."

"Ah, well," Sir Robert was beginning to reply, as Victor turned to shake hands with Gaie, and Lady Kellam addressed a remark to Donna and Sir John; but they were all interrupted, the door opened again, and the servant announced "Madame Prioleau."

"Ah!" exclaimed Sir John, hurrying forward to clasp her hand. "I am so rejoiced, my dear madame. Donna, you see my visit was not in vain."

"I found I could get away," replied Madame Prioleau; "the meeting was over early. I could not resist the temptation of your kindness. I have deserted all duties, and here I am. There were so many dear friends to meet," she continued, turning to the group of the four young people, as they stood together by the fire. "I am so glad to see you all again," she added, as she gave a hand, one by one, to each.

"Madame Prioleau," said Sir John presently; "my sister-in-law, Lady Curzon Kellam; Sir Robert Carre."

"Madame Prioleau and I have been introduced already," said Lady Kellam, as she rose and came forward with a polite smile. She hated "out-of-the-way" people—unconventional women and persons with individual and eccentric careers; and under other circumstances Madame Prioleau would have received the coldest welcome to her acquaintance. But, just at that moment in London, Madame Prioleau was threatening to become the fashion; London was talking about her. The Duchess of Athelstone called her "her dearest friend."

The Duchess had met her in Italy a year or two ago, just after the war, when Madame was being fêted, and rewarded, for her valuable service

with all possible honour by the army and the government. She was constantly to be seen now in the Duchess's carriage, often met at the Duchess's house, and, in many other drawing-rooms of equally unquestionable fashion and authority, it was considered, just then, "the thing" to have Madame Prioleau's name reported among the list of guests.

She had serious work to do in London; but she found it impossible to resist entirely those attentions and compliments from many old friends of other times and scenes. London, she said, would soon swamp her, if she let it steal her time. Fortunately, as she often thought, it was not for long.

In the meantime she was certainly the fashion. Lady Kellam tossed her head over it and said, "Wonderful people did get into society in these days;" but she was very civil to Madame Prioleau.

Then they all went down to dinner. Sir John carried off his old friend with evident enjoyment. Lady Kellam, as hostess and chaperone, had, of course, to appropriate Sir Robert; and with extreme dissatisfaction she was obliged to survey her two nieces preceding her down the staircase, Donna leaning on Piers Ashton's arm, and Gaie laughing and chattering merrily to Victor.

"This is a curious contrast," said Piers to Madame Prioleau, as he took his seat between her and Donna, "to the scene in which we last dined together."

"Ah yes; to be sure, I remember—at dear old Madame d'Alnigni's."

"Yes; the week before Victor and I left Paris."

"Certainly, a different scene; that quaint little French dining-room. We are contrasting," she continued to Donna, "your stately English room here, to the apartment where Mr. Ashton and I last dined in company—a tiny *étage* in the Place Vendôme."

"I dare say it was much prettier," said Donna.

"Different, quite. Equally pretty, in its way," said Piers, glancing round Sir John's handsome dining-room, and over the table glistening with crystal, covered with fine old Worcester china and stately old pieces of plate. "I think nations keep up their characteristics in their dinner-tables as much as in anything else. But I was remembering at that moment, more especially, the contrast of the people. Madame d'Alnigni and Lady Kellam might sit as contrasts representative of their national types; Sir Robert and Regnau—no parallel whatever there."

"Nor here," said Madame Prioleau, turning slightly towards Donna, with her winning smile.

Piers followed her gaze on to Donna's face, and her thought also.

"No parallel," he said, "but a clearly defined contrast comes out very strong."

"With whom are you comparing me?" said Donna, colouring and laughing as they both spoke.

"Not comparing—contrasting," said Piers, smiling. "We were only carrying out recollections of that dinner. You or Gaie, you see, are the counterpoints of Faustine Dax."

Then Sir John claimed Madame Prioleau's attention, and Piers went on.

"I wish you could have known Faustine; she would have interested you. She was Victor's friend, you know; they were almost brought up together. I wish you could know a great many of those people I used to see over there; they were such curious studies of a very strange side of life."

"I often wished," said Donna, "I knew more of the people you liked to live among: I think I might understand then better about your aims and your life."

"I do not think you would," he answered; "I seem to understand them so little myself."

"Tell me a little about it," she said in a lowered tone, "as you used to tell me long ago."

"I have so little I can tell," he replied, "except about places where I have been, and people I have seen; the rest, the theory of it all and the object, seems still confusion."

"Is it always to be so?" she murmured.

"I often ask that question of myself," he replied, a little sadly. "If the answer is to be in the affirmative, my life will be a failure indeed."

"Are your objects and your friend's objects still the same?" she continued. "Do you think just as you did when you wrote that last letter to papa?"

"No, not in the least the same; nor does he. I cannot tell you much about it now," he answered, "because I should have to use names and words that would attract attention and make people listen; and ours is not a cause that can be discussed in ordinary society of this kind. But I should like to tell you—there is a great deal I might tell you without transgressing any confidence whatever; and, Donna, it used to be very pleasant long ago, when we talked over everything together."

"Yes, I lost my only brother when you took yourself away."



"I had to do it," he said. "When it once takes hold of a man to know, to understand, to dive into the mysteries and difficulties of things, he must go on—on—till he comes to the end of it, cost him what it may."

"But I think if a man has people who care about him, and are just the same as a father and sisters to him, and are interested in all his ideas," said Donna, "he need not run away quite so entirely from them, even when he wants to find out about 'everything,' as you say. I think brothers should go on talking to their sisters, Piers, when they have been brought up with them."

"I do not think," he answered, with a curious dissatisfaction in his tone, "that brothers and sisters do talk together about everything, as you and I used to do, Donna."

"Oh, I am sure they do. At least, I used to long so for a brother when I was quite young, before you ever came, Piers; and then you were just to me what I used to fancy a brother would be, and I never felt I had not a real one after that first year. You were exactly like a brother to me."

"Was I?" he said discontentedly. "I do not think it is quite the same."

And he became reflective for a moment, and

then he would have spoken again, but Sir Robert Carre was on Donna's other side, and at that moment asserted himself and joined the conversation.

Lady Kellam helped him, and she took care it should not become a *tête-à-tête* again.

After dinner that lady's mind was most perturbed. She must "go on;" she was due at Mrs. Carrington Smythe's reception, and so was Sir Robert; and she had no card for the two girls. They were to stay at home this evening, and too provoking it was. Poor John had such an utter disregard of all prudence and propriety, to her thinking, that she would not be the least surprised if, after her departure and Sir Robert's, he allowed the two young men to remain as late as they pleased in his drawing-room, Donna talking philosophic confidences with that unsatisfactory young Ashton, and, still worse, Gaie, in most reprehensible felicity, singing to that scatter-brained Frenchman, and listening to his songs. It was too tiresome; and John, with his unmanageable obstinacy, drove Lady Kellam to despair. She stayed as long as she could, being polite to Madame Prioleau, talking over her cup of coffee to Sir Robert, and interrupting, with indefatigable perseverance, any effort at *tête-à-tête*

between the other four; but in vain. The time came at last; her carriage was announced; she owed a debt to herself as well as to her nieces, and Mrs. Carrington Smythe's "at homes" were never to be despised; so she departed, and soon after Sir Robert bowed himself away.

Sir Robert was not in the least in love, so *he* was by no means uncomfortable. He had certainly made up his mind that the "dark-haired Miss Graeme would make a suitable Lady Carre; but he had no anxiety on the subject, for Lady Kellam, he felt satisfied, would arrange it all; she understood the kind of thing, and would help him into this appropriate matrimony without allowing the affair to bore him. She had a niece to marry; he had a title and twenty thousand a year to bestow; and the rest seemed natural and undoubted. He did not feel it necessary to disturb himself personally in the matter: the vision of Piers Ashton never crossed his imagination with the slightest tinge of anxiety. Piers had no title, and a fortune small in comparison with his own; and Piers Ashton, moreover, had never been renowned, like Sir Robert Carre, as one of the fascinating men of his day. Piers had no London position—was scarcely known in a drawing-room or a club; Sir Robert Carre's was a voice of power

in every circle. He intended to propose to Donna before the season was over, but the intention by no means disturbed the equanimity of his mind. He followed Lady Kellam to Mrs. Carrington Smythe's house in Grosvenor Gardens, and was just in time to give her his arm, as she squeezed up the crowded staircase, and to express his polite regrets that they had left her charming nieces behind.

## CHAPTER VII.

“When Music, heavenly maid, was young,  
While yet in early Greece she sang,  
The Passions oft to hear her shell  
Thronged round her magic cell;  
By turns they felt the glowing mind,  
Inspired, delighted, raised, refined.”

WILLIAM COLLINS.

MEANTIME, by that moment, in Prince's Gate it was much as Lady Kellam had feared. Sir John and Madame Prioleau, in two large chairs on one side the fireplace, sat on, talking in tones of friendly interest of times of long ago. The notes of the piano came sweetly from beyond the archway, mingled sometimes with Victor's soft tenor, sometimes with the clear ring of Gaie's fresh young tones, German, French, Italian, English. The two musicians were enjoying their own special existence again in their own way; and on a low centre ottoman sat Piers and Donna, her brown head bent over a bit of work that occupied her fingers, and helped her to com-

pose the eager sympathy in her grey eyes, he, leaning towards her, his face lit up with earnest expression as he spoke, his glance kindling often as he raised it for answers or appreciation to hers.

"How that old bore interrupted our conversation at dinner!" was his first remark, as he sat down after the door was well closed on Lady Kellam and Sir Robert.

"Yes; did he not? Go on, Piers, just where you were."

"I have often wished," he said, "in all these years, that I could talk to you. Things have changed so much in one's mind as life has gone on."

"Of course they have; but tell me clearly."

"About the Universal, you mean? You see, I never became a member; they would not have me at first, and latterly I ceased to wish it. You know, the dream faded and died of that wonderful love and brotherhood we used to think would unite all classes of men. We see it now; it is impossible."

"And what has come instead?"

"It is difficult to tell you. Government must do it all; it is a politician's work. When I see my way quite clear, I mean to take up politics really now."

“You mean to stand for Pollingworth, as papa used to wish so much long ago?”

“Perhaps Pollingworth would not have me. I should have to stand on the extreme Radical side, and Pollingworth always returned a moderate Liberal.”

“Papa says Pollingworth becomes more Radical every day,” said Donna.

“Yes, so he told me to-night after dinner; so perhaps I may suit them in time. But I do not quite like the English idea of Radicalism and reform, after all, Donna: I am not sure that I care to take it up.”

“It will be time soon that you take up something decisively, Piers. You have gone on being doubtful so many years.”

“Yes, I know I have; it is terrible,” he answered; “but I do not think I am an uncommon case. Of course, I dare say you despise me because I am changeable and undecided, and always looking at questions on every side; but I cannot help that; it is my character and my difficulty, and I am sure it is so with many men. There are so many sides to every question one hears raised, and I have never yet found quite the one into which I can completely throw myself.”

“You mean questions of doing good?”

“Questions of politics and government and individual career, that is what I mean. Lots of fellows want to give themselves to the right way, if they could only see what is best to be done. I used to think it all easy when I first began, and that it only wanted energy and determination in some one to lead on; but now I see possible results on all sides quite opposite to what we really desire, and I see that men whom we have admired and looked to, and followed in their opinions and ideas, do not really care about the good of the people in the very least, but are simply making noisy speeches against other men, who are, in point of fact, living and acting just as they do themselves. For instance, I heard speeches last night, such as two years ago would have fired me with enthusiasm, with republicanism, and every sort of democratic idea.”

“And they do not fire you now, Piers?”

“I am *disillusionéd* about it all—about the nobility of their schemes and the reality of their aspirations. I have been so utterly disappointed over and over again. I think I know but one philanthropist who acts out his philanthropy, and one patriot who has lived out his ideal.”



“ You mean your friend Mr. Thessullson, Piers ? What a grand life his seems to be. Did you see the *Times* article on his works a few weeks ago ? ”

“ Yes ; an old schoolfellow of his and mine sent it to me. He deserves it all. Yes, it is a grand life. I call him a real philanthropist ; he lives what he speaks. You must know him, Donna. I will bring him to see you.”

“ Have you been down to the city to visit him since you arrived ? ”

“ Yes ; I spent all to-day with him, and I cannot tell you how refreshing it was, after all the vague speechifying we had last night about philanthropy and patriotism, and freedom and glory, to find one man who was *doing* something. I often thought of him and his letters and theories during many a day in Paris, and in different parts of the world, where I have heard men of Raoul Regnau’s type hold forth. Frederick seems such a contrast to that school. He never speechifies or makes absurd sensations, but goes on devoting simply *himself*, in that quiet, glorious way of his. Yes, he is a true philanthropist ; and as to patriots, Donna, I never certainly knew but one.”

“ You mean your adored Mazzini ? ”

“Yes ; one often remembers that simple, heroic character, when some of the lives of men that call themselves patriots in our day come before one. It is a very different sort of thing to hear him speak, or to study his thoughts and character.”

“But we do not want even Mazzini’s in this country, Piers.”

“We want idealists. We *are* too practical, too fond of material comfort, too fond of money ; in fact, we want men who can soar into higher thoughts among our leaders.”

“Perhaps ; but it seems to me we want practical energy more than anything else. We want men who can think nobly ; but, at the same time, act with power. Do you not think so ?”

“Yes ; but it is comparatively so easy to think, —so difficult to see anything to do.”

“Ah, there is so much I hope to see you doing soon, Piers. I do not want the best and strongest years of your life to pass in dreams and theories.”

“It seems to me they are passing ; and one has gone through so many transitions of feeling and opinion, followed so many theories, and found so many false, I begin to think it is the destiny of this generation—waves of the sea, tossed to and fro.”

“It will come all clear in time, Piers.”

“ I hope so, and I do think it is better to doubt, and wander and seek for years of one’s life even, and to test everything, and sift every kind of thought, than to start at once in a career with a fixed, narrow, bigoted set of opinions upon every subject. It gives one such sympathy, Donna, with every phase of mental struggle, with every condition of human difficulty ; and when I talked it all out with Frederick to-day, he agreed with me in this view. He quite sees, from what he knows now by observation and experience, that there is nothing we want more in the mind and character of the men who may be the guiders and pioneers of the future than that wide understanding of every variety of man, and that intense sympathy with confusion and difficulty, which can only be gained by having lived through it for one’s self. So by degrees perhaps people may begin to distinguish mental difficulty from moral sin.”

“ No one who really thinks, Piers, could confound the two.”

“ People do so every day ; and it will only be in a very advanced state of the power of reflection that we shall begin the effort to seek out always, from the midst of the confusion of mistakes, and difficulties, and wrong interpretations that spring up so thick round every new idea, the idea itself,

which, if good, must emanate from what *is* good, and, if true and genuine, must contain some germ of thought precious and beneficial for mankind; like our old dream of the 'Universal,' Donna, the idea of union—the German 'Einheit'—that seems in all reality to live and thrill through every country, through every school of thought, through every class. It struck me to-day when I saw Frederick's work, and talked over the political and social institutions of our country with him, it came to me forcibly that our old idea was just what *is* missing. His work is imperfect, because it stands alone. The links of a broken chain hang useless on each side. Union should take them up, and bind in oneness of effort, in sympathy of idea, his work from side to side till it touches every range of society, till it has assimilated to itself every political effort. That would be the true Universal for us in England, Donna."

"How I do like to hear you talk about it all, Piers! but—but you *must* not stop at talking. I long to see you doing, as well as others. I long to see you taking the place that should be yours in your own land. I cannot bear to see the years passing and passing away, and you still only dreaming and theorizing. Indeed, indeed, it is time you began to do. How curious it seems," she added, with

a sweet happy smile—"how curious it seems that I should be lecturing and listening to you, Piers, and scolding you just as I used to do years ago."

"It seems very pleasant."

"It is very good of you to allow me, when, after all, you know much better about it all than I do."

"No, I do not. I have gone through so much experience of contending influence, I have weakened in many of my theories. You have wonderfully strengthened in yours, Donna."

"I have always seen it the same way," she answered.

"Your schools and soup-kitchens and blankets found the solution after all."

"No, not entirely ; certainly not alone. These—at least the kitchen and funds—are only palliatives for what to my sex must remain incurable and painful disease. You, a man—all men of education and power—have a much greater work to do. You can palliate, but you can also do much to cure."

"And all these years I have done nothing."

"Ah, you will, Piers, you will. You are only gathering your strength in these years. You are still young, and you have all the old aspirations just the same ; and that is the great thing."

"Yes, that is what Thessullson always wrote to me—'Do not mind disappointments ; do not

despair over disillusion ; keep tight hold of the ideal, and the way will come at last.' That is what he always wrote."

"Yes ; but your position and his are not quite the same, nor are your characters. Your work will be different."

"If one could only see," he went on again, "anything to do half as glorious as the mysterious sort of excelsior one feels—feels at times, at least. Do you not know what I mean ? The sigh the soul seems to give sometimes towards—something, God knows what—great, sublime, indefinite. Certain things make one feel it more than others, and certain people," he added dreamily. "Faustine Dax did at first, but she lost the inspiring power."

"Is she not very beautiful ?"

"Yes, splendid ; still—I do not know—it goes off somehow, the heroic sort of feeling *she* used to give one. But people certainly *have* an inspiring power."

"Music has that influence over me more than anything else," said Donna suddenly.

They had been silent after the last few sentences, and she was looking up with a thoughtful expression, listening to Victor's voice coming in full, enthusiastic, vigorous notes from the other room.

“ Ah! *that* kind of music has it for me,” said Piers.

“ What is it he is singing ?” she asked.

“ German—a national song, is it not ?”

Victor and Gaie had wandered into national music and his old favourite German songs, echoes of these days of his boyhood spent in admiration of Arndt and Körner “ on the Rhine.” He was singing the “ Fatherland.”

They paused, and his voice rang out—

“ This is the German Fatherland,  
Where close shall be the clasp of hand ;  
Where truth shall from the bright eyes start,  
And love live warm within the heart.  
That shall it be—  
That valiant German shall it be.

“ One mighty nation shall it be.  
O God in heaven, we look to Thee :  
Give us the courage, strength, and will  
To keep it safe from woe and ill.  
That shall it be—  
One mighty nation shall it be.”

“ Einheit, Einheit ! The same old thought always,” said Piers. “ He was educated in Germany, you know, and delights in their music. It is splendid, is it not ? Now that is the sort of song makes me feel, all the time Vic. is singing, that there is something great and

glorious to be done in life if we could only lay hold of it."

"Yes, I think music more than anything else lifts me up, as it were, to peep into those mystical and ineffable spheres of aspiration, from which the human being is shut out in reality, of conceived idea, or power of practical achievement. I think music, more than anything else, makes one feel how great existence might be, and how small it is."

"Yes, you catch a glimpse of yourself, do you not think, and of all your undeveloped possibilities?" replied Piers. "Then you come back, and all achievement seems so puerile and unworthy."

"But it ought not to discourage or enervate our powers to feel so, I am sure. I think we should just do, every one of us, every day what we can; and these inspirations are precious too, inasmuch as we bring back a sort of light each time from these musical dream-lands, that gives a sense of beauty to our lower lives. And then the hope stays with us always, that these are glimpses of what *we* one day may do and be. Ah, he is going to sing again!"

And they were silent once more, as Victor's voice reached them, in another of his beloved German songs, an Arndt, an Uhland, or a Becker



—echoes all from those spirits of Germany who sang in the years before the battle of Leipsic—the times, as Körner has said, “that demanded great hearts, and for which great hearts were there.”

He finished with Körner’s own wondrous soldier’s song, the prayer that had burst from the young poet-hero’s lips, in the very heat of the conflict, beginning, “Father, on Thee I call,” and going on through the verses to the last—

“God, I acknowledge Thee :

So when the autumn leaves rustle around me,

So when the thunders of battle surround me,

Fountain of grace, I acknowledge Thee.

Ach ! Father, bless ! ”

Songs composed and sung then, as later, against France—songs Victor had learnt to love and appreciate through many a day spent in their worship, in that atmosphere of music and Beethoven at Bonn.

“What has set you off on German patriotism?” said Piers, as, after the last song, Victor and Gaie came in through the archway.

“A reaction in our minds,” answered Victor, “after that long course of the severer schools. Did you not hear us over Bach and Wagner?”

“We did not observe that part : we were deep

in politics, till the 'Vaterland' woke us up," said Donna.

"Wonderful, is it not?—that inspiration of Arndt! It beats the 'Marseillaise,' I think, or even the old 'Lillibullero,' which, as its author used to boast, sang James II. out of three kingdoms," said Victor. "And that last one I sang, of Körner's, is glorious too."

"It is wonderful. There is something very sternly grand and inspiring in those German war-songs," said Donna.

"Yes, they speak the character of the mighty people in all its solemnity and strength. Who is it says, 'Give me the making of a nation's ballads, and I care not who makes its laws'? Some one said it, I know, and there is a wonderful truth in it."

"A countryman of ours—Fletcher of Saltoun," Donna answered.

"So it was; and never has the saying been more strongly illustrated than in that burst of wondrous song, when the first Napoleon's star was in its zenith, and Germany utterly subjected to France. It rose like the voice of life among the people, and lived for ever, the precious records of the struggle, and the longing for unity that is graven in the hearts of the nation with the deep

sanctity of a religious vow. Where the statesmen failed in those days, the poet met with success. The hopes, that had died under military defeat, lived again at the words of Arndt, Körner, Uhland, or Father Jahn."

"You speak of Germany as of a second fatherland."

"A third rather: my life has been so cosmopolitan. France is my fatherland; Germany my school; England—Alma Mater—my university. I love them all."

"But France——" said Gaie. She paused, the question unspoken."

"Ah, France!" he replied, with a ring of tender pathos in his tone. "France—is my childhood's home. I think the passionate love with which the sons of her soil regard her — beautiful, wayward, unsteadfast France — is a different and a wonderful thing. France is our beloved, our mistress, our queen. The feeling with which we would give our heart's blood for her is something quite apart from the deep solemnity of the German enthusiasm or English national pride."

"You reverence Germany; you deign to appreciate England," said Gaie, laughing.

"And I would *die* for France: that is just it," he said, smiling, in answer to her words. "Piers,

is it not late? Have you not had enough of us, Miss Graeme, and of our music and patriotism?"

"Not too much," Donna answered, as she rose to take his hand. "Good night: we shall see you again soon, shall we not? Papa, Piers and Monsieur Lescar are going."

## CHAPTER VIII.

“Fair, sweet, and young, receive the prize  
Reserved for your victorious eyes:  
I, from a thousand beauties, more  
Distinguish you, and—only you adore.”

JOHN DRYDEN.

THERE is nothing, I think, so injured by an effort at its description as—the process of falling in love.

I am not going to trace the consecutive stages of feeling through which Victor and Gaie passed during the next few weeks. Nor will I endeavour to analyze the true source of those curious accidents of circumstance, by which Piers and Victor both found themselves impelled to arrive at Prince's Gate at least once every day.

It came so naturally; the spring of sympathy in the two younger characters was so spontaneous, so unalloyed, and so complete, that it grew rapidly into life and power with little actual conscious recognition on either side. From the

first evening they met, there never seemed to be any question either in Victor's mind or in Gaie's: they belonged to each other as completely as the piano, and Heine's sonnets, and Schumann's reveries belonged to both.

The quiet friendship between Donna and Piers was of another kind. It was of older date; it was but taking up the broken links of a "long ago"—a pleasant thing to do, an enjoyment full of deep interest and significance, and one it is the lot of few in this life to enjoy, unalloyed by bitter memories, untarnished by regretful tears. It was an earnest and intense enjoyment to both of them.

They talked in their grave way, and they mingled, as of old, their thoughts of life and its duties and destinies. Donna brightened in her new happiness like a soft dusky flower lit up by a ray of summer sunshine, and her brightness reflected itself in gleams of sweetness in Piers's grave eyes, and in rays of bright expression new to his dark face. Their sympathy and understanding was as perfect as Gaie's and Victor's, but they took it quietly in their own way.

To Gaie and Victor there seemed a new sun in the heavens, a new verdure on the earth! over the whole world of external and inner existence, there

was shed for their eyes a mystery new and beautiful, a radiance that made life at once a precious, a tender, and a holy thing.

Victor had found his "Queen."

Of course, Aunt Kellam interfered with all this as much as possible. She found Sir John in his library one morning soon after that dinner-party, and she attacked him at once.

"My dear John, are you blind? Are you mad? Is this sort of thing to go on?—have you no regard for your children's future? Have you no spirit of ambition for their welfare and their advance in life?" And a string of such like inquiries, mingled with expostulation, she poured on his head.

"My dear Catherine," Sir John had answered, "what is the matter? What am I doing? Blind!—what am I to see? Mad—! explain yourself."

"Do you mean," continued Lady Kellam, "to allow those two very unsatisfactory young men to go on coming here?"

"Unsatisfactory! Why?"

"My dear John, how can you be so obtuse! Highly unsatisfactory, I tell you; not at all the sort of men I should like the girls to marry. It will never do."

“But—are they going to marry them?” said Sir John.

He put his book down now, and took off his spectacles and looked interested and roused.

“There is no saying; there is never any saying, my dear John, what these things may come to. It is very unsafe—very unsafe, I tell you; and it must not be allowed.”

“But why unsafe? What are you afraid of?”

“Why, there is Donna, if she takes to that young Ashton, John, she is so obstinate—I see it in her character—I shall be completely outwitted in my admirable scheme for her marriage with Sir Robert Carre.”

“Carre!” repeated Sir John, slowly. “Is he looking kindly at my Donna, Catherine?”

“Well, he is not an easy man to land, I can assure you; but I really felt certain of him the very night before that tiresome young Ashton came.”

“Humph!”

“I did; I declare to you I felt sure of him. And, of course, I can keep it all right still on his side. He comes talking to me continually; but I do not feel at all safe about Donna, John. She is so foolish and wrong-headed about many things; and she is just as likely as not to take an idea



against this, especially if young Ashton is allowed to be in the way. And he is comparatively no marriage at all for her—a mere competency in the way of fortune; and he has never taken the trouble to make himself any position at all. He would probably take her down to that place of his and shut her up, or carry her off to Bohemianize in some out-of-the-way corner of the earth. He has no London position, and altogether he is not satisfactory, John. Do not encourage him, I beg of you; get him away. Sir Robert Carre would be a capital marriage for the girl;—title, splendid property, and everything we could wish.”

“Ah! I know something of Robert Carre,” said Sir John, reflectively. “He is old enough, Catherine, to have been near my own young days. We need not discuss him. As to Piers Ashton, he and Donna have known each other longer than you have known either of them; and if there is anything between them now, take my advice, Catherine, and let them alone. They can take care of their own little affairs, without you or I to help them.”

“But, my dear John——”

“I have said my say,” he interrupted. “There is not a grain of harm in the lad, and there never was. And if there is any nonsense in him still,

well, Donna will get it out of him. Let them alone, Catherine."

"But that is not the worst of it. There is the friend: there is Gaie; think of her. I assure you, Lord Dorringbroke is really charmed with her; and think what a splendid marriage it would be."

"That young Dorringbroke,—surely he is a bit of a nincompoop, Catherine; is he not, eh?"

"Well, as young men go, my dear John. What would you have?"

"What would I have? Not a nincompoop, certainly, Catherine."

"Well, come; with his prospects and position, I really think you need not be so fastidious, John."

"A marquis can afford to dispense with brains, eh?"

"Well, not that exactly; but, at all events, let us be rationally prudent. Do not allow that young Frenchman to remain in the way."

"The Frenchman is a very fine young man, Catherine."

"There are plenty of fine young men——"

"But not many marquises," he interrupted, laughing.

"My dear John, you are captious and tiresome;

you catch up my words, and you answer in enigmas, without taking the trouble to understand what I say."

"This young man in question, Catherine, has a good many of the attributes I want of the person to whom I would give a daughter of mine. He has brains, plenty of them; he is bright, chivalrous, and high-minded,—a brave, spirited fellow. I like him, Catherine."

"But a penniless foreigner—a nobody! John, are you mad? I ask you."

"Not in the least. He is not a nobody. He is the son of a Campbell of Ardsachy, as good old blood as any in Argyleshire; and his father, Alphonse de Lescar, comes of a fine old family on the Normandy coast. I am not so blind or short-sighted as you imagine. I found out all about the lad through Eugène de Hauton a day or two after Piers brought him here. He is a fine young fellow, Catherine,—not a bit of harm in him either. Not a spark of mischief in either of these lads, notwithstanding their harum-scarum ideas. Never fear; they will both come as straight as need be before long."

"But penniless, John, penniless."

"Not entirely; and besides, Catherine," the old man added, with a little sigh, "my two girls,

by God's will, need not look for money altogether in making their choice. I have no son of my own; they will have all I have to leave between them; and if either of them marries a man without landed property of his own, so much the better. She shall have the Old Towers, and her husband must take the old name. So all that part does not so much matter, Catherine. And, once for all, so long as my girls fix their minds on noble-hearted young fellows like these two here, and choose their company among such as they, whether they have thousands a year or nothing, you won't get me to interfere with any of them. So that matter is settled."

And that was all that Lady Kellam could make of Sir John.

It was hard upon her. She did her duty manfully, absorbing the girls on as many evenings as possible, and carrying them off in her carriage every afternoon. But the highest claims of the interests of chaperonage could not get her to Prince's Gate before luncheon-time; and these long spring mornings, which began for Donna and Gaie at most unconventionally early hours, the young quartette had all to themselves, over piano and politics, in the drawing-room or out

in the green budding park, with only dear old Sir John to disturb them.

He came up, certainly, with all due propriety, and read his leading article every morning by the round-room fire; and he always fetched his hat and stick with amusing solemnity, to accompany these expeditions into the park or gardens, which they all agreed were indispensable to existence in these London mornings for country birds.

So it went on; and among other things they did much sight-seeing. Donna's ardent enthusiasm for classic London was, after all, destined to be fully gratified.

For as the mornings grew more spring-like, and the fresh, early summer came on, Piers and Victor used to arrive at Prince's Gate each day, primed with all necessary information, ready with all necessary arrangements for some delightful expedition to out-of-the-way, unheard-of objects of antique, classical, or artistic interest, which no one probably would have thought of visiting, on these sunny mornings in the London season, except themselves.

The two friends enjoyed immensely ferreting out points for these delightful expeditions;—something, or somewhere, they had always in readiness for every day.

What a sweet, beautiful early summer that was, after the first brush of cold in May. How happy they were, these four young creatures,—how unconscious, how perfectly satisfied, how completely fascinated just then with life.

We will not follow them to all these curious explorations of theirs; we must linger with them but for one or two of these summer mornings,—mornings bright and beautiful as they were fleeting and transitory,—mornings that left sweet memories to rest on many future days.

## CHAPTER IX.

“ Before the beginning of years  
There came, to the making of man,  
Time with a gift of tears,  
Grief with a glass that ran.

\* \* \* \*

Strength without hands to smite,  
Love that endures for a breath,  
Night the shadow of light,  
And Life the shadow of death.”

ALGERNON SWINBURNE.

It was one June morning, after many idle, delicious weeks of philosophy and music, the two girls stood together at their conservatory window, busy with their favourite morning occupation of tending and watering the stands of fresh sweet-scented flowers with which their father loved to supply them. And they were just wondering over the plans for the day, when the door opened behind them, and their two friends entered the room.

Victor was evidently full of something.

“ Is Sir John at home ? ” he asked instantly, as they shook hands.

"I believe he is," said Donna," down in the library. Do you want him?"

"I have found something I want you to come and see this morning, if you will, and if he will allow us. It is a picture, and it is a long way off."

"Where?" said Gaie. "I thought we had done all the exhibitions."

"So we have," said Piers: "but this is not an exhibition; it is only one picture. It is down in Holborn somewhere, and this eccentric Victor has excavated it for us. I have not seen it yet."

"An old picture?" said Donna.

"No; quite a modern one. Look here: this will tell you all about it. But first for my story. I was walking down Piccadilly yesterday, and I met one of those extraordinary advertising men you have in this country; do you not know?—the fellows who go about with a great extinguisher on their shoulders, and their heads sticking out of the top—a huge yellow thing; and all over it was written the Latin motto, 'Mors janua vitæ.' So I stopped to read what it was, and found it was a picture, by a Scotch artist, Miss Graeme—Sir Noel Paton. I had nothing else to do. Piers had gone with your father to Westminster: I was all alone; so I walked down to see it, and I was



charmed. I want you to come so much. I have a particular reason," he added, "turning with earnestness to Gaie. "I want *you* to see it, and I want *all* of you to tell me if you see something in it I see."

"What, a likeness to somebody?" said Donna.

"You shall judge. Do you think Sir John will come with us?"

"Where are you going to carry me off to now?" said the old baronet, entering the room behind them at the moment: "into the Thames Tunnel, Lescar, or up to the top of St. Paul's?"

Victor turned round and laughed brightly as he shook hands with Sir John, and explained the present expedition on which they were bent.

Sir John took the paper from his hand, and turned with it to the window. It was a long descriptive poem; and his face softened and became grave as he read.

"A finely written thing," he said; "it must be pleasing to the painter to be so thoroughly apprehended. I have heard of the picture; I believe it is very beautiful. Do you want to go and see it this morning, my dears?" he continued to the two girls. "I have no objection; shall we go?"

"Do let us, papa"

“Delightful!” exclaimed Gaie.

“Be off and get on the trimmings then,” said Sir John laughing; and away they went.

In half an hour’s time, the large open carriage,—with Victor as footman and conductor on the box—was rolling down the densely crowded thoroughfare of Oxford Street into Holborn, and drew up, at his direction, at an unpretentious-looking door.

“This does not look much like a picture-gallery,” said Sir John, as Victor sprang down.

“No; it is not one,” he answered. “It is only a little room with prints and a few paintings in it; but the ‘*Janua Vitæ*’ is here.”

“Well, well, then out we get,” said Sir John.

I do not know how that picture came to be there; but there, in that up-stairs room, in the spring of ’70, that picture was. And perhaps many saw it (by accident as they did); and perhaps one here and there, who, before that summer was over, had tested their own knightly valour upon many a battle-field of France, when the memory may have come over them again and again of that picture, in all sweetness, comfort, and power. “*Mors janua vitæ*,” there was one at least to whom it often recurred.

"I want you to look at it particularly," murmured Victor to Gaie, as he walked by her side up the stairs; and as he uttered the words they entered the little room,—a small, poor place, a few prints hanging round the walls, a green table covered with pens and papers. Just facing them as they entered, a crimson curtain, and against it, in the full glow shed from a row of brilliant lights, hung Victor's picture.

"*Mors janua vitæ*," the wounded knight, fresh from the last dread conflict. He has sunk on his knees among the withered leaves of autumn; he has cast aside his broken sword; he has dropped his helmet with its crest of the falcon's plume; and bending over him, one hand on his shoulder, one silvery wing shadowing him as he kneels, is an angel's figure, clothed with a wondrous veil of half darkness, half light, in which the mysterious pale shadow of death seemed transformed into the coming messenger of life and glory.

They all stood silent a moment; then Donna's eyes sought Victor's with a smile.

"Do you see why I brought you?" he said, as he glanced from the picture to Gaie.

"Wonderfully like her," said Donna, in a low tone.

"So it is, certainly," exclaimed Piers; "I quite see."

"'Gad! I should like to buy the picture. Little one, did you sit for Sir Noel?" said Sir John, as he went close up to the canvas, and peered at the fair angelic figure through his glass.

"Is it really like me?" said Gaie presently, in a low, almost reverent tone. "I am not like that?" she whispered to Victor, who stood next to her. She looked up into his face; his eyes were sparkling, his lips trembling with intense feeling as he gazed at the picture.

Some other spectators had come into the room, and pushed into their line. Piers and Donna had been separated from them by two or three people, and Sir John had moved away as well. Sir John, indeed, has the nicest way of encountering always some very particular and some very conversational friend during these expeditions. Victor and Gaie stood alone.

"I am not like that," she murmured.

"Yes, you are; at least, it is exactly like you."

They looked in silence for a few moments; then Victor's eyes turned instead upon her face.

"Do you think," he said, "that if any one you cared for were wounded, and dying perhaps, that you would come to them like that?"

"I hope I would," whispered Gaie.

"Do you think there is any one in the world you could care for enough to remember them, if they were wounded and weary?"

"I think," said Gaie, "if I ever have a friend in battle and danger, I shall always think of that picture when—I pray for them," she added in a low tone.

"And if I am ever in battle, or in danger, or facing immediate death," said Victor, "and the angel of life comes to me to bring comfort and courage, I know she will wear always that face for me,—always yours. Will you let me feel it really so? Would you come?" he urged.

"You are not going into battle and danger, I hope," she answered, smiling up at him through the quick tears that dimmed her eyes at his last words.

"But if I were?"

"I would always think of you like that picture," she answered.

"And you would come, as that angel comes; I know you would."

"I would wish to help you, if you were in

danger," she answered. "But," she added, "the picture has a deeper meaning than that."

"It comes with a wonderfully strong meaning just in that light to me. I like these last lines of the poem Alexander MacLaggan has written about it."

He pointed to the foot of the page he held in his hand :

"So many a wounded Christian knight,  
Sore smitten on the battle-field of life,  
May live, with grateful heart and glowing soul to bless  
The hand that limned this lesson for mankind."

She read as his finger traced the words ; and just then Sir John touched her shoulder.

"We must be going, my dear."

They glanced once more at the picture, and Victor lingered with a loving and wistful gaze ; then his eyes sought Gaie's with a glistening softness, and they followed the others then in silence down the stairs.

## CHAPTER X.

‘The angel wrote and vanish’d. The next night  
It came again with a great wakening light,  
And showed the names whom *love of God* had blessed,  
And lo! Ben Adhem’s name led all the rest.”

LEIGH HUNT.

“DID you quite understand that picture?” said Donna, as they stood together after luncheon, before Aunt Kellam’s carriage arrived.

“I think I did,” said Gaie.

“I caught a sort of idea,” said Piers. “It is a fine thing; there seemed a very deep sort of lesson in it.”

He glanced at Victor, who was looking from the window in silence, his head thrown up, his eyes glistening, and a wrapt, earnest expression shadowing his face.

“I feel as if I could write what I think of it better than I could speak it,” was his answer presently, as they all remained silent. “May I do so?” he continued, looking at Gaie; “and I will bring it to you to-morrow.”

“Oh, do,” she replied. “It seemed only half clear to me. I should so like to see what you can write about it.”

“It will only be a description,” he answered, “to carry it home more strongly to the mind.”

Next morning he put a paper into her hand, as soon as he entered the room.

“Oh, is that the picture?” exclaimed Donna. “Do read it aloud, Gaie.”

“May I?” she said, glancing at Victor.

“Certainly; it is nothing but the description in most prosaic prose.”

And she read—

“This picture seems a parable of the consummation of the Christian life. All life is a warfare, and the Christian life especially so.

“The dying Christian is here represented as a wounded knight; the angel of death has beckoned to him, and he has trustfully followed the dark shadow through the dismal vale, until at length he has sunk down in weakness. The death-angel pauses, and lays her hand upon him; at the touch of her cold fingers, his blood freezes and his heart stands still—his humanity overpowers him.

“A moment of anguish; then afar off he hears sweet singing and the sound of many harps, and



the voice of the shadow beside him whispers, 'Fear not, thou hast been faithful;' he hears, and as hearing he believes; the veil of the darkness is rent aside, the shadowy figure is clothed upon with light, and the angel of death is recognised suddenly to be the messenger of life and glory. With the eye of faith, the warrior penetrates the veil: for him instantly, life triumphs over mortality.

"This is the central incident of the picture; and the accessories have been designed to intensify and elucidate this idea. The wild roses and other flowers, traceable behind the dread shadow, speak of heaven and its promised joys. At the entrance to the valley stands the white lily—emblem of that holiness, without which God is unseen; its stem, indeed, is crossed by hemlock, its roots are hidden by a cruciform tombstone; and rank weeds and thorns and withered branches are tangled around; but—above all flits a white butterfly, speaking the freedom and the purity of the soul redeemed.

"In the dim sky above, the waning moon typifies the mutability and evanescence of the life of earth; while a clear and steadfast star indicates the everlasting endurance of that which is heaven.

“Central, among all these typical surroundings, kneels the knight, his attitude reverent and humble, his expression speaking holy confidence and self-distrust. The traces of the terror through which he has passed are still upon him, not yet wholly conquered by his faith. The hand on his shoulder is still the hand of death, and he trembles ; but he struggles to gaze upwards, and her face, bent tenderly over him, is radiant with the light unapproachable, her head encircled with the iridescent halo of hope. The dark and light sides of her raiment are clasped with a Norse, bearing the Saviour’s head in cameo ; the clasp is of the shape used by early Christian art to symbolize the Lord, and its uniting position here is symbolical of Him as the conqueror of death and giver of life eternal. So, robed in light and darkness, with that wonderful veil clasped by the Christian’s Norse, she stands bending over him, angel at once of death material and of spiritual life, speaking and setting forth in words of strong consolation the message, ‘Mors janua vitæ.’”

They were all silent when Gaie’s voice ceased, till Donna said, “I think you have exactly embodied the idea.”

“May I keep this ?” whispered Gaie, as Victor

came over to her, and slid into the piano-chair near her side.

“If you care to keep it, certainly,” he replied. “I shall not forget it now; keep it as the pledge that, when I want my light-angel—you will come.”

He touched the piano gently after this, and played some bright music for a few moments, until Lady Curzon Kellam was announced, though unexpected at that hour, and their pleasant double *tête-à-tête* was disturbed.

## CHAPTER XI.

“ Oh, torn out of thy trance,  
Oh, deathless, oh, my France,—

\* \* \*

Where is hope and promise—where in all these things ?  
Shocks of strength with strength, and jar of hurtling kings—  
Who of these men will show us any good ?  
Shall these lightnings of blind battles give men light ?  
Where is freedom ? Who shall lead us in her sight,  
That have scarcely seen her footsteps where she stood ? ”

ALGERNON SWINBURNE, *Ode to the Republic*.

DURING that sunny summer, how were things going in France ?

It was the last year of the second Empire, the spring of the triumphant Plébiscite. Beautiful France was smiling in the soft luxury of its summer's bloom. It was gay and brilliant in her cities ; it was peaceful in her verdant rural nooks. France, the garden of Europe, was in the full beauty of her luxuriant summer, all unconscious and heedless of the dark and terrible storm that was gathering not far away.

The question of the Spanish crown occupied

men's minds early in that season. The young Duke of Genoa, busy over his studies in the ranks of the English school-boys at Harrow, was offered the empty throne, and for him it was declined. Others were suggested with as little success; and Prim was driven almost to despair.

In the person of Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern, the fitting monarch seemed at last to arise; and to him, as every one knows, in July, 1870, was offered the Spanish crown.

Then there rose through Europe the noisy angry protest of France. Then came Prince Leopold's withdrawal; and all who looked on at the ominous murmuring of a distant tumult hoped the matter was settled, and anxiety happily at an end.

But, alas! quick following the deceptive hope, France—feverish, restless, fated France—raised her voice again. What did she want?—war? Must she have war on any pretext, at any cost?

Was the fault all hers? Were Carlyle's strong, bitter words quite merited? Was there no covert provocation given by the stern, grave aspect of the other side?

It is but a history still of yesterday; its subtle questions futurity will decide. But France hurried all that fatal summer to her doom.

Then came the affair of Ems—the meeting of the König Wilhelm with the minister of France. Persistent provocation on the French side, philosophic endurance on the other, roused at last to indignant response: “The king refused to give audience to Benedetti again.”

This message flashed through Europe on electric wings. Paris was in a ferment; Berlin was like a lion roused; and the news reached England, and filled every heart with dismay. War was declared. France and Germany were rushing to battle. A horrid vista of bloodshed and national suffering, awful and immeasurable, stretched before many eyes that had loved to rest on the flowery gardens, the nestling homesteads, the sweet peaceful existence of rural France.

There is a beautiful little village near the frontier of Lorraine. Only last year, in '69, the Peace Amalgamation Society celebrated their festival there. It was in the lovely autumn days of but one year ago, and it was a touching, a curious sight—amid these little tile-roofed houses, and gardens gay with sweet-scented flowers of every hue. The bell tolled its evening message from the old tower at the village end; the soft lowing of cattle came from the distant fields; the children laughed and played in sum-

mer merriment; the dogs lay and slumbered in blissful luxury under the broad eaves; the old women brought their knitting to the house-door, and the young wives carried their infants through the shady streets beyond the fountain and the market-square, out into the lanes beyond the flowering hedge-rows, to meet "Benoit" or "Charles," who came back from their day of toil.

The sweet village of Buvoir; it seemed surely the millennium there,—plenty, comfort, happiness in these rural homes, and in the very midst of them the Peace Society celebrating the festivals of the universal brotherhood of men.

One year later?—ah! it was the first village entered by the Prussians. The fierce battle raged over the vineyards in its outskirts; fire and flames and cannon and death made the sweet paradise of Buvoir like a place accursed. It was reduced to ruin. Houses burnt, the old church-tower smitten to the ground, the gardens trampled, the fair fields, ripe with their glorious golden harvest, crushed under the heavy march of artillery, swept by the Uhlans' charge—a terrible desert. And all along the roads, towards the shelter of the forests and the covert of the far-sloping hills, stretched a long line of people—women old and young, children and infants, and aged grand-

parents flying terror-struck from their ruined homes.

A heart-rending sight ! Surely if kings, and ministers, and mighty leaders of the nations realised oftener such scenes, they would pause ere they allowed the wild passion for war and victory to break over a country, and sweep the peaceful peasantry from their humble and happy homes.

Poor Buvoir ! it was still all unconscious, happy in its sense of peace and security, when the news reached London, on the 15th July, that France had declared war.

The season was drawing to its close—a brilliant season, which to Victor and Piers, Donna and Gaie, had appeared the very sunniest summer of their lives.

And the Graemes were talking of a return to Scotland, and of the visit Piers and Victor were to pay them as the autumn went on.

Piers, under a new sense of duty aroused by Donna's influence, was going first to Pollingworth, where she had assured him he would find much to do ; and Victor was to go over to Paris, to visit old Père Dax, who was ailing, to see Faustine, and to perform various mysterious duties for his perplexing calling and weary cause ; and then late



in August he too would accept Sir John's cordial invitation, and go to the Old Towers.

Sir John felt it required nothing but a thorough understanding on all sides to get both the friends well rid of whatever "antipathetic" nonsense remained in their minds. About Piers he had no longer any doubt or misgiving; and as to Victor, it seemed to him that a quiet time at the Old Towers, a month's grouse-shooting, a few long stalks over Crag Earen after the red deer, a visit to the old home of his Campbell ancestry, and other little pleasant influences besides, would make a thorough Scotchman for ever of him, and justify Sir John in his own eyes for the indulgence of this fancy of his for the young Frenchman, and the sense of irresistible attraction that actuated his tacit choice of a son-in-law. He liked the two lads; he confessed it.

This autumn in Scotland promised surely bright days for them all; so they planned in early July.

Then came these ominous messages from France, expostulations from the British Government, and the refusal by France and Prussia of any conciliatory interference from foreign Powers.

Fiery letters came from Paris to Victor, from Raoul, from Rochecarre, from Faustine, from Tolberg.

They were so happy at Prince's Gate, so full of life, of hope, of joy ; and the news came threatening and ominous, awakening deepest anxiety, causing excitement thrilling and intense. A few days, just then, sufficed to change the current of every thought, to flood the prospect of their whole future with a new and unexpected light.

For a few days, things remained merely threatening, and people drew their breath, and paused. Victor paused like the rest, uncertain between two paths for a moment, an impulse driving him instantly to Paris, a new power, strong, urgent and passionate, binding him to London. He paused.

Meanwhile, before the season drew to its close, Lady Kellam decreed that Sir John Graeme should give a ball. It was no more than his duty, she said. Nations might war against nations ; Europe might be, from north to south, a scene of trouble and dismay ; but the London season must be wound up appropriately for Lady Kellam and her "protégées ;" and this would only be fully achieved by their father giving them the most brilliant ball of the season at their own house.

So it was all arranged ; and while Victor and his friends, in England and abroad, were watching with breathless anxiety the turn of impending events, Lady Kellam was placidly superintending

the issue of those endless and important cards that announced Sir John Graeme and Lady Kellam "at home" on the 15th.

Donna and Gaie had to assist, of course, at this onerous "social duty," as their aunt called it; but their minds were far more full of the Spanish question than of the prospect of a ball, and each little eager heart had its own hidden and special secret that made their interest intense and keen. Victor and Piers, as well as their father, brought them constantly the fluctuating intelligence of these previous days.

Lord Granville's letter was written about the 13th of July, and the world watched anxiously for its effect.

Lady Kellam's and her nieces' "at home" was to be the very next day but one.

Victor spent many nights, at this time, in those haunts about Leicester Square and Soho where the growlings of the war-lion were angry, excited, and loud; and he often shook his head as he talked to Piers afterwards, and sighed.

"I do not like it," he would repeat; "I do not like the spirit of the whole thing. They have not got hold of the right end of the cable amongst them yet. There will be mischief out of all this some day."

Victor had been long in Germany ; and he shook his head too, sometimes, when those early bursts of enthusiasm for war and victory rose in cries of “ À Berlin ! ” from every Frenchman’s lips.

He still viewed the question somewhat in that same true light in which, strange to say, the Emperor Napoleon himself once saw it, some twenty years ago ; when Louis Buonaparte, an unwearying student and a clever military tactician, made his calculations, drew his charts, and worked out his conclusions in the solitude of the prison of Ham. What influence dazzled with such fatal fascination these same eyes in the summer of 1870, that had seen it all in its strong true light, but a few short years before ?

But so it was ; and so events hurried on, and so there drew near the day when war was declared between France and Germany, and—the evening of Lady Kellam’s ball.

## CHAPTER XII.

“A more precipitated vein  
Of notes, that eddy in the flow  
Of smoothest song, they come, they go,  
And leave their sweeter under-strain  
Its own sweet self—a love of thee,  
That seems yet cannot greater be.”

COLERIDGE.

ON the morning of that day, the two friends came to Prince's Gate, only to say, however, that the early telegram had brought no fresh news. The house was all upside down, the large drawing-room cleared for dancing, Donna's round-room prettily decorated with flowers and arranged for *tête-à-têtes* and chaperones, the piano gone from Victor and Gaie's favourite corner, the violet curtain thrown back, and the archway gaily festooned.

The house, Victor said, did not look like itself. Lady Kellam had been there already this morning, to give her last directions, and to see that every arrangement had been properly carried out.

Among other things bearing directly upon the evening, she had had interviews with both her nieces on the subjects respectively of young Lord Dorringbroke and Sir Robert Carre. Both were to be present that night; and Lady Kellam called the two girls separately to the boudoir, and discoursed to them in turns with an eloquence and pathos worthy of a better cause.

She loftily ignored the existence of Piers and Victor, and touched tenderly on the feelings of Sir Robert and Lord Dorringbroke, as if *their* happiness was her most sacred interest and her first concern.

“It is really wrong,” she had said to both her nieces, “trifling in this sort of way, and throwing away, my dears, your precious prospects in life.”

And the girls had said—nothing. Both felt strongly, but neither felt certain how much she was yet entitled to say. Piers and Victor had come, and come through all this bright happy summer; and somehow to both the sisters it seemed that they all belonged entirely to each other, without question—without need of words; and the idea of any one else coming for a moment between them seemed absurd and impossible. But still neither Victor nor Piers had said any-

thing that either girl felt she was conscientiously called upon to repeat.

Indeed, Victor had not awoke yet sufficiently from the soft intoxication and sweet delirium of his love-dream to realise that anything practically had to be said; and Piers was very contented, too. It was delightful to have Donna again to talk to; her sympathy and companionship brought a wonderful sense of completeness into the vista of the future in his life; but making a speech on the subject to her, or to any one, had not occurred to him either. Everybody was contented and happy. Hitherto there seemed nothing to say.

Lady Kellam's matrimonial lecture, however, had worried the two girls; and they were standing together in the great empty drawing-room, deep in an earnest discussion as to how Sir Robert and Lord Dorringbroke might be utterly and finally extinguished, when the door opened, and the two friends entered the room.

Piers made a disconsolate face as he looked round him, and the others laughed.

Victor had been grave when he came in first; but he lit up with a glance of irrepressible fun as he watched Piers, who walked round the ball-room and examined the different arrangements with a grim air of decided dissatisfaction.

"It will be a very pretty ball," Victor said.  
"This room looks beautiful."

"Do *you* like a ball, Donna?" Piers asked.

"Sometimes—yes: it depends," said Donna.

"Oh, I do!" said Gaie, "when the music is good, and my partner is good, and the floor is like this one—like a bit of ice! Oh, Piers, it would do you a world of good if you were fond of dancing."

"What have they done with the piano?" said Victor, laughing.

"Look round and see," Gaie retorted.

He glanced round the room. A little orchestra had been cleverly built out over the porch and balcony; and there was the piano, hidden with festoons of flowers and evergreens, in a verdant bower, to be lit up in the evening with hanging lamps.

"How charming!" he exclaimed, with a Frenchman's love of the picturesque or festive.  
"What fun! May I get in?"

And as Donna nodded her permission, he stooped under the flower-wreaths, and disappeared behind the piano, among the pink calico and green leaves.

In a moment Gaie was spinning over the smooth, glassy surface of the empty room, her



two little hands clasping her tiny waist, as the strains of "Ander blaűen Donaű" came ringing with irresistible verve and energy from the green orchestral bower.

"How splendidly he plays!" exclaimed Donna, as the beautiful floating rhythm of the Strauss swelled with the crashing vigour of a German band at a Casino Tanz, and then sank softly away again into the smooth undulating cadence of the blue Danube River.

"A German tune, too," said Piers, to whom all music was embodied generally in the epithet, tune. "I wonder at Vic."

"It is such a sunny spirit," said Donna, "the least thing lights him up."

"Yes; he was quite melancholy as we came along. Poor old boy, it is an anxious moment for him just now, and for nearly every friend, French or German, he has in the world."

"Music has more power over him than anything: it always seems to rule his mood, or to express it."

"Yes. Ah, he is done with his waltz-playing now."

Gaie had stopped as Donna spoke, and had approached the green archway, and was leaning against the end of the grand piano that protruded

towards the room. And Victor, after playing through one or two waltzes of Strauss or Gung'l, was running his fingers now over the notes in his favourite, dreamy, suggestive way, as he looked up at Gaie, her face appearing to him in a setting of flowers and green leaves, her cheeks flushed with the energy of her pirouettes round the ball-room, and her blue eyes reflecting the gravity that was following quickly the flickers of sunshine in his. Her thoughts were answering the turn of his thoughts too, as they grew absent and sad, and as the echo of the waltz music died from beneath the touch of his fingers.

"We must not stay," he said as he played softly on. "We only came for a moment to give you the latest news."

"Where are you going now?"

"Back to the telegraph-office first; then—to a meeting," he said, taking his fingers from the piano. "There is a great gathering of all the Frenchmen resident in London, to consider the probable steps."

"And shall you speak?"

"Possibly; but no great difference or question on the subject can arise. If war is finally proclaimed, of course all capable Frenchmen will instantly—go."

Gaie said nothing: the colour had quite faded from her cheek now, and she looked at him with unspeakable question in her eager eyes.

"Yes," he said, "we must all go. But I cannot quite see how it will turn out, and what will suggest itself as the best for all of us to do."

His face was very pale, too, now; and he looked up at her with a tremulous quiver on his lips and a sad wistful earnestness in his eyes.

"I do not quite see yet what will be our immediate duty: a few days will decide. How I seem to know every note of this piano!" he continued, suddenly changing his tone, and striking a chord softly again: "it speaks like no other instrument to me. I believe that to some people's ears every piano has much the same sound—good, bad, or indifferent, according to their respective value. But I very seldom get any one to agree with my feeling, that every single piano, when one knows it, has a difference in its tone just as distinct and individual as the voice of a friend. What do you think?"

"I fancy," said Gaie, "there is to me more in the touch of different players than in the piano's sound, as long as it is a tolerably good one; but that piano is always different from any other when you play it."

“I have enjoyed wonderfully playing on it, and I stick to my opinion of its individual tone. If I never saw it again,” he said, taking his fingers off the notes and looking up into her face, “I should be able at any moment of my life to recall its answer as you touch each note.”

“I hope you will play on it many times,” said Gaie.

“Malgré tout,” he answered, smiling a little sadly, “qui sait ? qui sait ?”

“Play something now.”

“Oh, we must be off ; but stay, just this little thing. I will sing it to you. You know the air, but perhaps you never heard the words : it is Schubert’s ‘Abschied ;’ ” and he sang.

The tears were glistening on Gaie’s eyelids as he finished.

“Such a sad, sad song to choose,” she said, “on such a sunny day.”

“It came into my head last night, and I thought then,” he answered, rising, “I should like to sing it to you. I got the words two years ago from a Pole, a young fellow I knew very well ; and he had got them from the very people to whom the poet, who had written them for Schubert’s music, sang them, that once and only time when the words were ever heard from him.

It was in southern Poland; he was staying in their house one night, on his way to join the army. He sang them these words quite unexpectedly, quite suddenly, as they were separating in the evening. He left them the next day; and in two weeks afterwards he was killed. They never saw him again: that was his 'Abschied.'"

"I wish you had not sung it," she exclaimed again. "I wish you had not sung such a melancholy song."

"In a ball-room!" he said, as he bent under the flower-wreaths and came into the room. "It was too bad; and I could not have sung them," he continued, turning to her with earnestness, "if I had not known we were to meet again in about five hours' time. We are coming in the afternoon, you know. You have given me leave to exercise my Frenchman's prerogative of bringing you some flowers: they are coming from Paris, if Paris has time to remember my commission. I think she will; I think they will come, and I may bring them to you myself? Good-bye till then. Piers I must be off: the forenoon post and the telegrams will be in by this time. We will bring you the latest news," he added, "in the afternoon."

## CHAPTER XIII.

“The tread of armies thickening as they come,  
The boom of cannon and the beat of drum,  
The brow of beauty and the form of grace,  
The passion and the prowess of our race,—  
The song of Homer in its loftiest hour!”

EARL OF CARLISLE.

At five o'clock the flowers came—baskets laden with fresh beautiful bouquets for both the girls. But no Victor appeared, nor even Piers.

The midday mails had come in when they walked down to the office, and the news was decisive. There was no hope, no doubt. The call to arms was rolling with stern power through Germany, was thrilling with wild excitement every heart in France. “To arms! to arms!” “à Berlin!” “am Rhein!”

The post brought to Victor a budget of letters—one from Faustine, a torrent of excited patriotism, of revolutionary projects, and new dawning hopes; and from several of his party rhapsodical echoes of the same. And with these came another letter,

curt and soldierly, from his father, telling him to join the gathering without an instant's delay ; and telling him that his post was ready—that already there was secured for him a commission in his own Artillery corps. The brave old Lescar wrote with all the fire of the soldier of France, full of confidence, thirsting for new military glories, and delighted at the thoughts of action and campaign.

There was much to do, much to be arranged, many people to see, much discussion and fiery oratory to be heard among the French in London during the next few hours ; and it was soon decided that a special train should start at midnight from Charing Cross for Dover, and that the company of Frenchmen hurrying to rally round the colours of their army should be thus conveyed.

It was a marked day in the history of Europe, that Fifteenth of July. Those two great nations, fevered with the war-passion, swayed from their hearts' centre to their utmost verge : excitement everywhere was intense.

But still Lady Kellam's ball must go on ; and she had affairs to arrange, as she hoped that night, more important to her individual interests than the coming destinies of the whole armies of Germany and France.

She received her brother-in-law's guests with a grace as composed and complacent as if there was no more important question at stake for that evening than the success of Lady Curzon Kellam's ball. She thought a good deal more of that article in the *Morning Post* of to-morrow, than of the *Times* leader on the aspect of European affairs.

Not so her two nieces. They had scarcely seen their father that day. He had stayed late at the House that afternoon, coming home scarcely in time to eat a morsel of dinner and to be present in the ball-room when his guests arrived. And, like every earnest mind in Britain that evening, his was sobered with deep regrets that harmonised little with the festive aspect of his home.

The intervention of the British Government, although brought with every force and effort to bear, had failed ; and every British statesman was grave that night with the stern realisation of the gravity of the time.

The girls had seen their father for a moment, and he confirmed what, all the afternoon, had been reported on every side.

Yes, there was no doubt of it ; war was proclaimed ; Germany was arming from the Rhine to



the Danube ; and France was calling her soldiers from every sunny corner of her realm.

“ And Piers and Victor ? ” they had asked.

He did not know : he had not seen them.

The two girls were full of anxiety ; every sympathy and sentiment of their hearts seemed touched and aroused. The coming ball in their own home seemed utterly in contradiction with their anxious thoughts and excited feelings ; but still the guests would be coming directly ; they must dress and appear.

The large rooms were quite crowded some two hours later, when Piers and Victor at last arrived. They were both grave and silent as they reached the house ; and although Victor’s eyes sparkled with something of a Frenchman’s eagerness and enthusiasm, his cheek was deadly pale.

He ran up the stairs, scarce waiting for Piers’s slower movements ; and he reached the crowded doorway, and scanned the glittering mass of dancers with a rapid searching glance. He scarcely seemed to see them ; and of Lady Kellam, waiting at one door for his formal salutation, he was utterly unconscious.

He was full, evidently, in his quick impulsive way, of just one idea ; and the ball-room and its crowd of dancers, Lady Kellam and her frown of

dissatisfaction, made no impression on his mind. There was enough of troubled, excited, and contending feeling struggling in his eager heart at that moment to make him forget everything in existence save the immediate future and the destiny it contained.

Patriotic as he had ever been, eager soldier in spirit, Frenchman to the core in his love for the land and her military glory, enthusiast as he was ever sure to be for any cause in which fate led him to participate, still, there was struggling within him, at this moment, a new strong passion, infinite in power as in sweetness, speaking with unconquerable resistance against the destiny to which duty led, a power that rose in strange opposition, at that hour, against the passion for patriotic glory he had worshipped so long. The struggle was bitter; it filled his heart with its intense pain.

The room was very full of dancers, but he soon distinguished the face he sought. Gaie was just opposite to him. They were waltzing at that moment, and he had to pause until the dance was concluded before he could cross the room; then he threaded his way. He went straight towards her, and in utter disregard of Lord Dorringbroke, who was bending over her and whispering softly

his small remarks, Victor looked into Gaie's face with an expression she answered instantly, by the quiver of her lips and the tears that rushed into her eyes. She rose.

“Will you come?” he said. “I want to tell you.” And she rose and took his arm.

## CHAPTER XIV.

“The rose is fairest when 'tis budding new,  
And hope is brightest when it dawns from fears;  
The rose is sweetest washed with morning dew,  
And love is loveliest when embalmed in tears.  
Oh, wilding rose whom fancy thus endears,  
Emblem of hope and love through future years.”

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

LORD DORRINGBROKE had indeed looked indignant, but Gaie had quite forgotten him.

Victor led her through the crowd, out at the drawing-room door, past Lady Kellam with silent audacity, and out on to the landing, which was still as crowded as the room.

They paused, and he looked down at her for a moment, and then half mechanically they both slowly descended the stairs. But still there were crowds everywhere. The supper had just begun in the dining-room; the library was full of ladies, cloaking and being uncloaked. Gaie's hand trembled on Victor's arm as he looked round distractedly.

“Where shall we go?” he said at last in despair, but in perfect simplicity, as if his wish to appropriate and to talk to her at that moment was quite a natural thing. It seemed so to both of them, at all events.

“Here,” she said at length ; and she drew him aside towards a door, which she pushed open and he shut behind them, as they entered the room. It was her father’s study, and sacred against all invasions of tea and ices or even ladies’ cloaks. His writing-table stood in the centre, his huge book-cases with marble busts on their summits lined the walls, and a bow-window opening on to a row of steps that led into the garden filled up one whole side. There was no light in the room ; but the blinds had not been pulled down, and there streamed through the window the beautiful radiance of a midsummer full moon, and the large garden and sombre room were illumined by its soft silvery light.

They walked close to the window, and Victor leaned on it ; and for a moment they looked in silence into each other’s faces.

“Good-bye, Gaie,” Victor said at last. “It is very hard to say it.”

She caught his hand.

“Victor, Victor, I cannot.”

"You have heard it all," he went on; "I must go. The call has come, Gaie; look, here is my father's letter. It is all arranged; but I could not go,—I cannot leave you without saying—without telling you how difficult it is."

"Victor, Victor!"

"Let me tell you, darling," he continued. "I may call you so; I may say to-night, 'Gaie, my own, my love,'—I may tell you how it is for me. I never thought I could live to answer with one sigh of reluctance the call of the army of France. But it is so,—I scarcely know *how* to leave you."

Her face had sunk into her hands, and she stood before him with her head bent, the moonlight falling on its golden shades. She could not answer him.

"And yet, Gaie, my queen, I must go; just as life has become sweet and precious and dear to me, I must go. It is hard—it is hard, and yet every sentiment within me, worthy of a man or a soldier, says go. Gaie, you would not have me stay, darling,—even that we might be happy together, just you and I."

"No, no, Victor, I know; I know you must go," she murmured.

"Thank you," he said, with a tight heaving of his chest. "Say it again, Gaie; strengthen me,—

send me, drive me from you. Oh, look up, look up ; speak to me again ; give me courage to leave you."

And he drew her hands gently from her face and held them in his own, as she struggled with her tears and raised her eyes to him. She shook her head.

"You do not want courage, Victor," she said.

"Not to fight for France, not to die—no, no ; but to leave you. I love you—I love you. I never loved any one until I knew you. I was always, always looking for my Queen ; and, Gaie, the moment I saw you, I knew I had found her."

"We have been so happy, Victor," she said ; "so happy, so very happy."

"It has been too much heaven for me to last, darling. I should soon have forgotten everything, I think—patriotism, the Universal, and everything. All these long sweet weeks, Gaie, I have only seemed to want just you, and now, I must leave you."

"Victor, I am so glad it has all been. I am so glad we had so many times, such nice times, dear, all the evenings when we played ; and, Victor, more than everything, the day we went to the picture."

"We shall never forget anything, shall we,

darling—never, never, whatever may happen in the time to come ? ”

“ Victor, Victor, *can* people forget ? ”

“ Some do ; but I do not think you could, and I do not think you will be afraid of me.”

“ Not of your forgetting ; but, oh, Victor, what may come ! ” and she shivered from head to foot, and her cheek paled again. “ War——”

“ And war means battle and bloodshed, and perhaps—death.”

“ Victor, Victor, I cannot bear it ! ”

“ Dearest, it may not be so ; but if it is—then, Gaie, we will think of the picture. Then you will come ; you will remember, I know. I shall feel your face bending over me, if ever I am wounded or going to die. And when victories come, and I have perhaps medals and trophies of our glories to show you, I will bring them all to you to lay at your feet, my Queen.”

“ Victor, Victor, it is too terrible.”

“ Think of it in that light. It will be a glorious war, and we Frenchmen have more to do than many know of against those stern German ranks ; but there is no fear, Gaie, we will bring you back our laurels, and you will not scorn a knight from the victorious armies of France.”

“ Victor, oh, I wish it need not be ! ”



“It must, it must,” he answered. “It has been threatening many a day, and it has come to-night. Ah, Gaie, I have so little time ; we are going to-night, and there is still so much to be done ; but I felt I must come to you. It would not have been enough to write and tell you how I love you ; I felt I must come and get the answer, dearest, from your own lips and from your own blue eyes before I went away,—the answer I want, that will go with me as my hope, and my strength, and my inspiration, wherever I may be led. You love me, Gaie ?”

“Victor, I have been so happy since that day at the picture, when I thought first you did care for *me*, as I could not help caring for you. It seems so wonderful—such a little while ; but it made me so happy.”

“My darling !” he bent, and drew her close to him.

“I could not help it, Victor ; and now, oh, it is so hard—so hard. Why must it be ? Oh ! the cruel war ; just as we realised what it is to be together, and what it would be always for ever—for all our lives.”

“Courage, my darling ; nay, do not weep for me. I shall be sorry you ever had to know me, if I have only brought you pain ; and I cannot

be sorry, I cannot; for it is so much to me. The memory of your face,—your love, my angel of the ‘*Janua Vitæ*.’ I may have the thought of you now always, always with me wherever I go: You will wait for me, and love me, Gaie——?”

“Victor, Victor, you know I will.”

“My own one, I must go, Gaie. I must see your father; I must tell him, in a few words, what I have said to you. I hope he will not think it very wrong, darling; but I could not go—I could not, without telling you, how—I leave you *all* my love.”

He wound his arm round her once more, and held her close to him for one little moment, and kissed the tears away, and murmured his broken words of comfort and courage; and they stood together, in the quiet moonlight, in the silent anguish of mingled and struggling feeling, thrilled with intense joy at the full assurance of each other’s love, and pierced with the bitter pain of the parting that must, must be.

“Gaie,” he murmured once again, “I must go: it is late. Farewell, farewell! Can you not give me something—some little thing you have worn?—something to look at, and to touch to my lips, when I think, all alone, by the camp-fire, in the long nights, of you? Give me something. Look,

darling, take this from me," he added, drawing a small ring from his finger and slipping it on hers. "It was my mother's: keep it for me till we meet again."

"I will always wear it, Victor. Stay; what can I give to you? What have I down here? Ah, yes; how curious!" and she drew back from him a little, and put up her hands to unclasp the gold chain by which a closed locket hung round her neck. "Will you have this? Look; would you like it? It is not mine; it is Donna's. I told her to-night, while we were dressing, I had put it on by mistake. But I can give her another. Look; is it not curious I should have it here?"

She touched a spring, and the locket sprang open, and revealed an exquisite tinted miniature of herself. Victor exclaimed with delight—

"May I have it? Oh, Gaie, I am so glad! Thank you, thank you. I shall have you really with me now."

She slid out the chain that had hung in double rows round her neck, and stood up as he bent towards her, and flung it over his head.

"There!" she said, laughing through her tears, "I give myself quite—quite—to you."

"God help me, Gaie; it is terrible to leave

you. God give me courage; my darling—my darling, good-bye, good-bye.”

He held her close to him for one minute; his heart seemed breaking with its tumult of love and despair. But—he must go.

Another moment, and they stood again in the crowd on the staircase. Gaie, utterly forgetful of every other guest of the evening, had drawn her hand from his arm, and fled up-stairs to her room; and Victor, pale and agitated, searched among the dancers and the supper-party for Piers and Sir John.

Meantime, Piers had had nearly as much on his mind for this evening as Victor. He, too, was going abroad. His friend, beloved and well tried through many a changeful year, was going away from him, and going into scenes of trouble and danger.

Victor was to join the rank and file of the gathering army; and, without hesitation, Piers determined to accompany him, at least to Paris,—as much further as he could. He, too, was going; he, too, had his farewell to say.

But Piers never could go direct to his point as Victor did. Promptitude was the salient element of one character; hesitation and diffidence, of the other. So, when Victor entered the crowded

ball-room, made his way direct to Gaie, and appropriated her unhesitatingly, and led her from the room, Piers had stood still, leaning in the doorway, watching first Victor and Gaie as they passed close to him, and, when they were gone, watching with grave consideration several other groups on different sides.

He stood a long time as they danced round him ; and thus he had the benefit of several bits of conversation not intended for his ears.

He had shaken hands with Lady Kellam, and she had glanced uneasily round as she saw him enter ; and her expression brightened into complacency as he paused near her, and stood by the door. Satisfactory so far, she thought ; for Sir Robert Carre was left in undisturbed possession of Donna on the other side.

“How pretty the two Miss Graemes look to-night,” said a voice suddenly, quite close to Piers, who, glancing round, perceived that a couple of dancers had paused by his side.

“They do,” was the answer. “Where is the little one?”

“Oh, she has just left the room with that young Lescar. What a handsome fellow he is!”

“Yes ; a Frenchman, is he not ?”

“I believe so ; half English, though. He is

off to-night, Sir John tells me, to join the army of Lorraine."

"Is he? Like a Frenchman, dancing to the last."

"Ah, exactly. There is young Dorringbroke. Is the little Miss Graeme going to marry him?"

"So says everybody."

"And everybody generally knows."

"No doubt about the other one, at all events," continued the first speaker, nodding towards the other side of the room. Piers turned his tall figure half round, and looked down on the couple. They did not know him by sight, as it happened, so in happy unconsciousness they went on.

"Never expected to see Carre so completely taken," said the gentleman. "He is regularly done; and I do not wonder either. She is an awfully nice girl."

"Then it is settled?"

"I believe so; looks like it, does it not? But we are losing all this music. Shall we dance again?" And they waltzed away.

Piers stood alone again, his eyes resting dreamily upon nothing, his thoughts suddenly arrested in their complacent tranquillity by a quick, angry recognition of something in somebody or in himself.

How he hated that Sir Robert Carre, he thought;

and, oddly enough, he had never known he hated him until now. How could he ever have been civil to him?—"conceited, got-up old fool!" Donna like him? Donna going to marry him? Impossible!

And yet, there, as he stood silent and hesitating in the archway, Sir Robert, at that very moment, was rising to give Donna his arm, and was leading her towards the head of the staircase by the other door. Piers was indignant indeed.

Well, he thought, if she would go, if she wished to go, if she walked out of the room, and never once even looked towards him, or came to speak to him, at her own ball, among all this strange crowd, why should he care?

He could not know that Donna, at that moment, was going slowly down-stairs, very wistful and sad at heart because he had stood there so silent and so sulky, and had never come up to speak to her.

But he felt aggrieved and angry, though why, or at what (unless it was Sir Robert Carre), he would have found it difficult to say; but he stood still, pulling his moustache, and conducting himself in that peculiar manner too common to him in scenes of this kind, when no one came to rouse him up—conduct that some people imputed to

an interesting shyness, and others to insufferable airs; and all the time he was feeling very miserable. "He was going away," he thought, "and Donna did not care. Long ago surely it was different; when he went and came, she used to care." And then the memories of those old "long-ago" days came pleasantly to him. Her friendship had been so sweet, her companionship so sympathetic, so helpful in every way; and now he seemed to realise she had become more to him than she had ever been before, and he wished to tell her so; he wished to say good-bye, he thought, and to say it somehow differently from all former farewells—to say, he did not quite know what; but he wanted Donna, he hated Sir Robert, and he felt bitter and aggrieved.

Victor did not return, nor did Gaie, for a long time; but Donna came again, she moved about the rooms, but still she seemed to keep away from him. She spoke to her guests, she passed from one group to another, she did her honours, and all the time Sir Robert never seemed to leave her side. And people danced, and went and came, and descended to supper and returned again, and sat on the staircase, and panted on the landings, and waltzed and quadrilled, and waltzed again.

Sir John talked here and there to the different



chaperones, in his grave way ; and all the talk, as he took them to supper and brought them back again, was the war—always the war : people could speak that night of nothing but the terrible aspect of France and Germany, of that woful war.

At length a hand touched Piers on the shoulder. He turned suddenly : Victor stood by his side, pale with agitation, with quivering lips and glistening eyes.

“ Old fellow,” he said, “ I must be going, and, for one moment, I must catch Sir John. You are coming, are you not, Piers—you are coming with me ? ”

“ Yes, yes, Vic. Where have you been ? Where is Gaie ? What is the matter ? ”

“ Never mind. I will tell you everything presently. She has gone up-stairs ; she will not come in again. I must just speak to Miss Graeme one word of good-bye, Piers, and then I must see Sir John. Will you wait for me down-stairs, old friend ? We must not lose one moment.”

“ Yes, yes, I will be ready. Stay, I will see Donna ; I will tell her. Where is she ? She has left the room again ; ” and he looked with gloomy irritation around.

“ She went out by that door,” said Victor, “ an instant ago, with Sir Robert Carre. Yes ; tell her

I shall not have time to explain more than to Sir John. Gaie will tell her everything, of course."

"All right," Piers answered; "I will be ready for you. I will go and find Donna at once."

"In ten minutes I will be in the hall with you," said Victor; and he crossed the room to Sir John.

Piers had wasted all his time; he, too, now, if he had anything to say, had not a moment to lose. He ran down-stairs towards the dining-room. Many guests were leaving; the rooms were much emptier now. Donna stood near the table; and close by her, speaking in low, earnest tones, was Sir Robert Carre.

Piers was sufficiently intent on his object now, at all events; he went up to them unhesitatingly, breaking in upon Sir Robert's conversation.

"Donna!" She turned instantly at his first word; Sir Robert stood back.

"Will you——?" said Piers, hesitating again. "I want to say a word to you—of good-bye, Donna. I am going with Victor to-night; and——"

She turned to him as he spoke, and put her hand within his arm. She thought he wished her to move away with him, but he stood still. Sir Robert looked annoyed at the interruption,

but shrugging his shoulders with a polite sarcastic little speech, in which he described himself very truthfully as being *de trop*, he bowed and walked away.

Donna looked curiously up into Piers's face. She did not quite understand what he wanted—what was his mood. She realised the announcement that he was going away, and that did not surprise her; but Piers's aspect did. He was flushed evidently with unwonted excitement, and his face was clouded with strong feeling.

The few guests that remained were dancing up-stairs again now. When Sir Robert left them, they had the supper-room to themselves.

“You are going, Piers?”

“Yes. Victor has been called to join the army, and I cannot let him go alone. I *must* see what becomes of him; I must accompany him as far as I can. And before I go, oh, Donna,” he said, changing his tone suddenly to an accent of angry and passionate expostulation, “you are *not* going to marry Sir Robert Carre?”

“I, Piers?” Her eyes softened with a half-amused, half-happy light in them, as they rested upon his troubled face.

“Because, Donna,” he had caught her hand in his, “I am going away, and—you *know*. Donna,

all these years, ever since we were boy and girl together, you must know what I feel for you, and I could not stand it now, Donna—I could not.”

“What, *you* feel for *me*, Piers?” she whispered softly.

“Yes, you *must* know I could not bear it now, if you married any other fellow. I could not do without you, Donna. I should never go right; I should never come to any good. All my hope lately has been in having you. And now, if, while I am away with Victor, *you* marry Sir Robert Carre!” He stopped in his outburst of protest and agitation.

“Piers, Piers!” said Donna, holding his hand tight as she looked up at him, and her voice ringing with its echo of irrepressible tenderness, “do you *really* think that in all my life long I have ever cared for any one but—you?”

“I am so glad,” he said gravely; and then he looked down into her clear eyes for a moment with an expression of intense relief and self-consolation in his.

“I am so happy,” she whispered, “so—so happy, Piers.”

“And so am I; but I must go away,” he continued a little disconsolately. “I must go, must I not, Donna, with Victor?”

“ Yes, yes ; dear, brave Victor ! Where is he, Piers ? Where is Gaie ? Oh ! how terrible it all is. Why, why will people allow wars to be ?— oh, Piers ! ”

“ Yes, it is terrible,” he said ; but he spoke in a dreamy tone, and he put up his hand and pushed his hair back from his forehead, while the bright satisfied look still shone from his eyes ; and “ Donna,” he went on, “ I am *so* happy. It seems horribly selfish to say so, because of Victor, and because I know what it must be for *him*. But I cannot help it. Donna, I am very happy ; and Victor—ah, here he is ; and we *must* go. But—I will write to you, Donna ; and it is all right between us now, is it not ? I am so glad ; and *you* will write to me.”

They had not time for more. There was Victor, and behind him Sir John, with a softened concerned expression on his face. One silent clasp of the hand between Victor and Donna, a few more eager words from Piers, Sir John’s fervent blessing and warm farewell for both of them, and they were gone.

## CHAPTER XV.

“The wounded from the battle-plain,  
In dreary hospitals of pain,  
The cheerless corridors  
With cold and stony floors.

\* \* \*

Lo! in that house of misery  
A lady with a lamp I see  
Pass through the glimmering gloom,  
And glide from room to room;  
And slow, as in a gleam of bliss,  
The wounded sufferer turns to kiss  
Her shadow as it falls  
Upon the darkened walls.

\* \* \*

A lady with a lamp shall stand  
In the great history of our land,  
A noble type of good  
Heroic womanhood.”

SAINT FILOMENA.

LADY KELLAM’S indignation, when all this was revealed to her, may be imagined, but not described—the vain remonstrances that she heaped upon Sir John, the fumes of fury in which she indulged during a prolonged interview in his study, and the frame of mind in which she

finally repaired up-stairs, wept over her nieces, sighed over them, and felt unspeakably irritated and provoked as she met the glow of quiet intense happiness that spoke in both faces, struggling like a gleam of sunshine through the tears that lingered from the partings of the night before. Piers and Victor were gone, indeed ; but they had left a memory very sweet and precious behind.

Still the girls had had rather a sad day. There was a violent reaction, as evening came on, from the intense excitement of the ball, the explanations, and the partings ; and, by five o'clock, Gaie was sitting by Donna's low chair, leaning her head against her sister, and dropping many a silent tear, as the realisation began to come fully to her of the possibly terrible future that lay before her, and before him who loved her, and whom she so dearly loved.

Piers would be back, safe and happy, before long ; but Victor—ah ! what might the next few weeks portend of weal or woe for him ?

They were feeling a little sad and lonely, for their father was out ; and when Lady Kellam had left them, the two young hearts seemed too full to speak, even to each other. They sat there, Donna's fingers twining themselves slowly in Gaie's bright hair, the fire dancing upon both of

them, and the tea-table forgotten by their side. And they had been silent for some time, when the bell rang suddenly, footsteps were heard upon the stairs, their door was thrown open, and the servant announced "Madame Prioleau."

Both the girls rose instantly; she came forward with a hand to each; but it was to Gaie she turned first, with a quivering tenderness in her face, as she put her arms round the girl and drew her close to her, and smoothed softly her wavy hair.

"Dear, dear child!"

"You know?" Gaie whispered.

"Yes; he came to me for one instant last thing, on their way; and he was so bright, so hopeful, so happy, and he sent you back his love."

"Dear Victor!" Donna said; for Gaie only dropped her head on to Madame Prioleau's shoulder for a moment, and could say nothing.

"It was splendid to see him, bright, brave young soldier. I must take him the latest message from you."

"Take him!" exclaimed Gaie, raising her head to look into Madame Prioleau's earnest face.

"Yes, I am going; I have had my call. They



have a place for me ready. "I must go and take it at once. I only came to you for a few minutes. I am off to-night."

"You, Madame Prioleau? Oh, dear!" sighed Donna.

"You!" exclaimed Gaie, brightening up suddenly. "Oh, how glorious! How I wish I were you! Oh! if we could only go, Donna. Why cannot we? Why cannot we go?"

"Our father, Gaie," whispered Donna.

"Yes, yes, I know; but, Donna, Madame Prioleau, fancy staying here in the midst of this idleness and sunshine and frivolity, while you are going—while every one is going. Oh, it is terrible!"

"We need not go out any more now, dearest; no one will wish it—no one will make us," said Donna.

"No; but even if we do not, to stay here doing nothing—nothing—nothing—while you are having such a great, grand work to do, and serving really in the Cause—oh Madame Prioleau!"

"*They also serve, who only stand and wait,*" murmured Madame Prioleau, as she bent with a soft caressing gesture over Gaie's head. She was silent a few moments; then she looked up, and

went on brightly again in earnest tones to both the girls. "Fear not, my children ; love work—look for work : you will find it, or it will find you. Wait now, Gaie—wait, and write to him, and hope, and trust, and pray."

"Yes," sighed the girl impatiently, "just the woman's part always—the most terrible, the most difficult, the worst to do—nothing but stay and wait."

Madame Prioleau gathered her into her arms again.

"Patience, my child," she murmured, "patience, courage—fear not ; all will be well. Trust your future—I feel sure it will be a bright one, however much it is clouded now ; trust it, my child. Look forward, and above all look up. And now I must leave you," she continued, turning to give a hand to Donna with a brightened smile. "I have seen Piers too," she said. "I am so glad for him—he seemed so happy ; and you—I need not ask. Ah ! the sweetness of a first ideal ! Dear young friend, I am so glad ; and now good-bye. Think of me, Donna. I will never forget our happy talks ; and perhaps we may meet again some day—who knows ? But I will think of you often, and with keen interest in your life. You have a glorious future, I do

believe, before you. That is a noble nature—dark only from the very shadow of its own depth. With you as its constant sunshine it will light up into clearness and brilliancy, and shed light for others upon many a gloomy way. Keep up your courage, my children. God bless you both.”

A few more words of murmured farewell—a warm, lingering embrace for each of them, and then—the two girls were solitary and disconsolate again, for Madame Prioleau too was gone.

## CHAPTER XVI.

“ May I express thee *blameless*, then, since God is Light,  
And never but in unapproached Light  
Dwelt from eternity ? Dwelt, then, in thee ?—  
Bright affluence of bright essence increate.”

MILTON.

It is over.

From the Rhine to the Loire, from the Meuse to the Seine, France is crimson with her children's blood. The terrible months are over : the Emperor is in exile ; the armies of Prussia cover the fair fields of Lorraine. The vineyards are wasted ; the harvest is trodden under foot ; the peasant homes are desolate ; the smokes of a hundred villages rise sadly to heaven.

War has done its work.

The crown has been torn from the brow of proud France : she is conquered ; she is wasted ; she is in chains. Famine and bloodshed have swept over her fair surface ; horror and death have shrouded her gay cities with darkness and gloom. The voice of mourning rings ceaselessly through

the land, and far away in Prussia its echoes rise also in many a desolate and empty home.

Ah ! these unspeakable horrors of war ! But yesterday we were proud of our civilisation, boastful of our powers of reason, of our age of peace. To-day we hide our faces and sigh wearily ; for what has civilisation done for war-stricken nations ? —what, but made death more abundant, and destruction more swift.

The Prussians entered Paris to-day : the War is over. Gay, laughing Paris has fallen, defeated by famine, worn out by want and despair. That dark terrible winter is at an end ; the thirty thousand of Prussia passed under the Arc de Triomphe to-day.

The sun shone cheerily as it shines ever over Paris in the early spring ; the city lay silent beneath its bright evening rays, as these grave troops filed under the archway, the trophy of departed glories, insignia of the victories of the eagle in times gone by.

Paris lay silent, her streets empty, her windows darkened and closed ; the charred houses, broken towers, homes unroofed, trees burnt and blackened, bearing testimony everywhere to the terrible days that had been. It is the history of yesterday : I need not tell it ; you know it all.

Paris has yielded. That terrible winter of starvation and suffering has been in vain.

The sun, the glad bright sun of Paris, seemed to smile with a mocking radiance as it lit on those houses, darkened with the bitterness of her humiliation, upon silent homes, full of hearts passionate and angry—hearts drawing their breath, submissive for one moment, but full of new strange excitement and thoughts of resentful fury, full of smouldering, still-unextinguished fire.

Paris is humbled to the very dust. She veils her countenance, and the conqueror treads her streets. It is a terrible day for her—the darkest her bright, thoughtless, passionate existence has ever known.

As the troops of the Crown Prince were filing into the Champs Elysées, as the dull thunder of the artillery growl was silenced and passing slowly away into the distant echoes of the past, as that afternoon closing proudly for Germany, the warfare of their Rhine faded into night, in the midst of that strange stillness which succeeded, with a curious stunning effect, the ceaseless roar of artillery, in a small house remote from the scene of the Prussian triumph, beneath a roof blackened and torn by a Mont Valérien shell, in a little gilded chamber, an old man lay dying.

The sun was struggling through the closed lattice, and fell in thin single golden rays across his bed : it touched the grey locks that curled on his forehead ; it answered, as with a strange glow of heavenly light, the smile of peace and satisfaction that lingered on the pale lips. It will not be expelled, that ray of sunshine ; it breaks in to meet the sweet radiance of the pure spirit that is passing from earth's darkness to the morning-break of everlasting day.

Auber Dax's eyes turn towards the sun-ray, and he greets it as it touches his worn cheek with a smile sweet and radiant as its own. Pure sunshine, bright messenger reaching a dark and sorrowful earth from an azure heaven : pure spirit, whose bright mystic thought was surely a sun-ray shed from a crystal fountain of light, pure and heavenly—shed upon a world still all too dark, too degraded, and too selfish to receive the sublimity of your Idea.

The sun-ray will have returned to heaven ere the day dies, and the city is shrouded in night ; and the pure spirit will have fled away, weary and baffled, to the haven of undying peace, ere that other night, darker and more terrible than any that has yet been, rolls over Paris, plunging again her children in horror and in blood.

The little chamber is almost empty, save for

the bed on which Dax is lying ; the chair, the table, every article of movable furniture, has been consumed in the smouldering stove through that weary winter, in the dire struggle against the chill enemy that with the winter came. Fire has been blazing in lurid flames from scores of burning houses throughout the winter ; but fire has burned low on the hearthstone, and hundreds had perished with cold ; and want and hunger, and disease from famine, had paled every cheek, had wasted every form, and many—all the old and feeble—had sunk down, as Auber has done, glad to be at rest.

Auber had held up bravely ; and that silver eloquence of his, in that old familiar voice, had nerved many a sinking heart, had revived patriotism and energy anew in many a failing soul. But now he had fallen. Paris had yielded ; and, wasted, weary, saddened, and full of sorrow, he had sunk down ; and, mourning for the children of his nation had bowed him for many hours—until now.

Now it was over : earth had rolled from him ; all those short, transient spasms of human suffering had ceased to reach him and to agonize his heart. Memory had faded, and a soft veil had fallen between him, and all that bitter past.



A future had dawned ; the clouds had rolled back. He only saw the sunshine now ; and, gilded by those fair old visions of his, brightened by hope, assurance, confidence, and joy, he seemed as he lay there to gaze down a glorious fair vista of redemption for the future of France. " Chastened, but not destroyed ; " the promise had come to him, " purified but full of life, pregnant with bright triumphs still." So he lay and murmured, and smiled towards the sunshine, and whispered fair promise for the future of his afflicted land.

At his side, hanging over him, with the dark light of her eyes gleaming with unwonted softness, her black lashes wet with glistening tears, stood Faustine, changed terribly by these months of suffering, paled by the gaunt hunger of many a day. She was changed in attire also : she wore the short blue frock, the dark jerkin, the red sash and rifle-belt that had been carried, during the past few weeks, by such of the women of Paris as joined their friends, brothers, and husbands in the toil of her defence,—the women who took turns as sentinels, and carried the gun through midnight watches, while their worn-out compatriots fell for an hour on the roadside and slept ; the women who, during that first siege, won the

applause and honour—we wish the second siege had left them.

Now, in the stillness of that evening, even Faustine had forgotten, for one passing hour, defeat, capitulation, and the shame of Paris. Her arms were thrown aside; even France was forgotten. The fire of patriotism, the flash of fury that spoke the blood of the “Marseillaise,” had left her beautiful dark eyes; and they were soft with the tenderness of her womanhood, and wet with sweet, filial tears.

She hung over Père Dax in silence, or whispered broken answers to his murmured words. Her eyes rested sadly upon his face, and were only raised from time to time to fix themselves upon another face—the pale, worn countenance of Victor Lescar, who leaned upon the bar at the foot of the little bed, and gazed with dry, pained eyes upon the old man.

The sun sank away; the light grew dim in the fading eyes; the thin, worn cheek became pale with the grey twilight shade of evening, as it filled the room.

“It is nearly over,” sighed Faustine, a struggling, passionate throb of feeling in her voice.

“Nearly over?” the old man murmured,—his ear had caught her words,—“over; the night is

past; the dawn will come. Peace, peace,—brotherhood,—the King——”

“King!” said Faustine bitterly; “he is wandering indeed.”

“King?” whispered Victor. “What! does he remember long-ago days, think you? Not emperor; king, he says.”

Victor came round and stood by Faustine’s side.

“The King in his beauty,” murmured old Dax again—“our Leader! My dream,—the Prince of Peace—Peace!” he added eagerly.

“The Prince of Peace?” said Victor, bending close to him, and speaking in low, earnest tones. “You remember him, at this hour, *mon père*,—you call upon Him?”

“He never knew the name!” exclaimed Faustine, in a low tone of impatient denial.

“Yes, yes,” whispered the old, weak voice again; “Him, Victor—only Him. I know Him—St. Marteau—the little church—you remember. No, no, I was a child then; you were—ah no, not you, not her—not Faustine; my mother,—Pasteur Arnau’s voice! My dream—my dream! Peace—brotherhood. It is His,—only His, Victor. It comes! He comes!—the King!”

Victor bowed his head.

"The truth returns to him—the old, old truth," he murmured. "The only Prince Universal,—yes, *mon père*, the Prince of Peace."

"He will come," sighed old Dax; and his voice grew fainter still. "Seek Him, teach Him, know Him—Paris—France—the world. Then my dream, it *will* be—Brotherhood and Love—peace and plenty. My dream! my dream!"

"And He is——?"

"In heaven," whispered the old man. "Sunshine—sweetness—life, Victor—all Him! Truth, Love, Brotherhood, and—*my* dream!"

"Thank God, his dream returns to him," whispered Victor: "the battle is over; the sorrow is gone, and the end is peace!"

"Peace!" exclaimed Faustine; "only for such as he is—only where he is going. Oh, where, where?" she uttered passionately; "*mon père! mon père!* where does he see his peace? Where does he catch that light, that sweetness, Victor, that smile? And here—ah! he leaves us; and for us all is blackness, shame, and despair!"

"Hush!" Victor murmured low. "Hush! do not disturb him."

The pallor and repose of death were creeping over the old man's brow. Faustine sank on her

knees, her face hidden by her quivering hands, her strong young frame shaken by sobs, agonized and passionate. Victor laid his hand softly on her shoulder, and bent over her prostrate head and over the old dying man. The feeble hand was outstretched now; the eyes were growing dim; the sweet smile was settling into a fixed expression of repose upon the thin lips. The hand moved feebly, and felt for something, with eagerness. Victor took it into his, and guided it to the resting-place it sought. He laid it on Faustine's head—that dark, proud head, bent in prostration of sorrow now.

The old man's eyes sought Victor, and his lips moved.

"Peace to come," he whispered again; "the Prince will come—love—brotherhood—France!"

Victor answered the quivering smile. He bent and touched the pale brow with his lips, and then he watched silently.

It was but for a few moments now. The sun faded quietly away. Faustine knelt still, sorrowful, speechless. Twilight filled the room with its grey, dreamy shades; and—as a weary child, when the night drops her curtain, sinks into soft repose—so Father Dax passed, from his restless children, away beyond the tumult and rebellion, the tears

and the troubles of his passionate nation—away to the land of his dream, to the source of his tranquil vision—away to the realisation of which he had seen the dim shadows here—away to where only—

“ Beyond these voices there is—peace.”

## CHAPTER XVII.

“ Ah, thou undaunted daughter of thy sires,  
By all thy dower of lights and fires,  
By all the eagle in thee, all the dove ;  
By all thy life and death of love,  
By the full kingdom of that final kiss  
That sealed thy parting soul and made thee his.”

ROBERT CRASHAW.

IN the midst of the gloomy excitement that for the next two days filled Paris, there were friends found, and time found to accompany the old father of the “Universal” to an honoured tomb. Amid the silent, shadowed streets, while the Prussians lay encamped in the Champs Elysées, while the growl echoed from corner to corner of Paris, of that storm that was yet still to come, the procession moved from the Place St. Etienne, bearing Auber Dax from his charred and ruined home.

In the evening it was over, and soon forgotten. Men, and especially such men as had formed the circle of Auber’s friends, had their minds full of many other things.

And even the hearts of these two, to whom he was dearest and most near, throbbed with the fevered fire of new ominous excitement, as they returned side by side to the Place St. Etienne again.

The little gilded room, where Faustine had once held her soirées, where men had brought her those fragrant trophies of their devotion, wreaths of sweet-scented flowers, it was like every room of Paris at that hour, desolate and comfortless, when the two returned to it this March afternoon. Faustine, with eyes dull and weary from sorrow and watching, had passed through the little sitting-room, and had gone up-stairs, leaving Victor to wait for her below.

“I will come back soon,” she had said as she left him. “I must see you, and talk to you, Victor. I have much to say. But wait—let me have a few moments: I would be alone.” And so she had left him.

And Victor entered the little room, and glanced round at its changed and barren aspect—at the dim and dusty ornaments of the walls, at the windows where no flowers scented the spring air, at the fireplace empty of the crackling wood log, at the ruin and devastation that he knew marked, as it marked this one, every Parisian



home ; and, a great sigh escaped him, and he tossed aside his cap, and pushed back the hair that grew long and untended over his pale forehead.

He was terribly changed. Years, instead of months, might have rolled over his head since he parted with Gaie on that July night of last summer. Years of age, and anxiety, and bitterness had settled in deep lines upon his brow ; and his fair delicate features were worn and pallid, as with suffering of heart and spirit, as well as of bodily frame. He had no scar of sword or shot upon him, however, though he had passed through many a battle for France.

To trace his steps for the last eight months would be to follow the fortunes of the French army from the loss of Sedan to this moment in Paris—a history too familiar to require one descriptive word.

He had joined as the troops assembled in Paris. He had been present at Wörth, Gravelotte, and on many disastrous days round Courcelles or on the Meuse. He had been distinguished many times ; he had been under a thousand fires, and had escaped untouched. He had lived a new life, tasted a new glorious passion of existence, suffered a new torture of national shame, all in that quick

succession in which the pages of history had been turned in that war. Life in action, glory in the gathering armies of France, passion for her victory, shame, bitter and insupportable, at her defeats—shame that tortured, till it begat, in *his* as in many a heart in France, anger, stormy, and rebellious against the faltering leaders of their ranks, begat a fearful madness of fevered patriotism, the offspring of that burning shame.

The standard of their France lay torn in the dust; their eagle was brought low; their glory was gone. France was defeated; their land was trodden by the conqueror; and Frenchmen lived to confess their shame.

He lived: no German bullet had touched him; death refused to spare him the humiliation and the bitterness of disgrace. He lived; and his arm was still strong, his blood was still young and fiery, his heart vigorous and proud; and he must live, the son of defeat, the soldier of a conquered army, a child of France, a partaker of her shame; and it seemed impossible!

Live at ease, while she lay prostrate?—live in peace, while she bent in chains? Impossible!

It was a terrible fever, that in that dark hour of the conqueror in Paris, fired the young brains of France.

A conqueror reposed complacent under the Arc de Triomphe, beneath the chestnut shades of their Elysées; and Paris, young, turbulent Paris, was mad.

Victor had been sick with the fever and wild with the passion of this insanity for long. Well or ill, in truth or in fatal error—who can now decide?—he and one or two others of his spirit had been chafing through many a week against the conduct of the generals of France. Metz had capitulated, Strasburg fallen, Alsace and Lorraine were gone; who was to blame among these generals? God knows! Was any man to blame? Who can say rightly? The blows had fallen, defeat had overtaken the country, and blame turned on one and on another, here and there.

In the ranks of Bazaine's army, under the short rule of Gambetta, in the camps at Nevers, everywhere feverish, restless, eager, perhaps able, young spirits all had argued thus, "The thing might be better, had *we* the work to do."

Victor was a leader among these men. France might be saved, he had dreamt often; France might be redeemed on principles of action on which at least he could theorize. And he did theorize, and moved here and there, telescope in

hand, and with maps, notes, and propositions to lay eagerly before every authority who would give him a hearing ear, or cast over his papers an attentive eye. Would they only listen to him! he exclaimed again and again. But they would not listen.

Things took their course; the war proceeded. Defeat followed defeat, and France was crushed to the ground. And there still grew in Victor's brain that fever of patriotism, that agony of national pride, that wild delirious hope that redemption and salvation for their beloved country still lay for France in the power of her sons. He would not resign the hope; he would not resign it and live.

He lived, and the hope lived with him; and when Paris at last capitulated, he rushed there. "Paris capitulated, and thousands of false Frenchmen, cowards and unworthy, lived," he exclaimed with angry bitterness, "to tell the tale!" He lived, and others lived, who felt, as he did, that "the tale must not be told." Arrogant, self-confident boy, as men called him. Perhaps he deserved the name. Doubtless he was in error: doubtless France *had* poured her best life-blood, and her hour had come. True, resistance was madness; and the rebellion of the Parisians,—the

history of the Commune,—the second siege of Paris, was—on all that bitter page of French history—the darkest stain.

But, men like Victor stood among its ranks ; hearts as true as his raised that standard against submission. Blood as pure as the warm current that flowed in his veins was outpoured in that last dread struggle of a losing cause. Certainly, as a frenzy of mistaken patriotism we may well describe the delirium of shame and passion that filled his breast this evening, as he sat alone in the Place St. Etienne, and looked wearily round the little room—as he cast himself on the low couch under Faustine's window, and buried his pale face in his arms—as he sighed in the struggle of his heart's anguish, and tossed back his head again in the weariness of that long despair.

He was very weary. He had arrived the night before, after hasty travelling, from the camp at Nevers. He had come instantly on the news of the Capitulation ; he had cast aside his uniform then, and sent in his resignation to the headquarters of the army. He was no longer a French soldier ; he refused obedience to what he thought a cowardly and weak command. He refused his assent to peace, to capitulation, to terms of any kind with the enemy. He repudiated the thought

of Prussia's acknowledged victory while a soldier lived on the soil of France.

False theory, perhaps, and hopeless. But that young officer,—who, as all know, threaded his way in a bold disguise, reconnoitring the enemy that lay around the walls of Metz and Strasbourg, whose voice was heard later eager in the chamber of the generals, loud in suggestion in the presence of Gambetta, strong, powerful, vigorous in his efforts of reorganization at the camp at Nevers, and who spoke unheeded, and was expelled unheard,—who knows what spirit inspired him, what power lay unaccepted in his hands?

It was only another such young artillery-officer (chef de brigade) who moved among the guns at the siege of Toulon in the month of Frimaire, 1793, who gave the counsel and led the way by which the tricolour floated on Port d'Eguillette, and Hood weighed anchor and sailed defeated away. They heard his counsel in that month of Frimaire, they listened to that young artillery-man, that short, olive-cheeked, taciturn man, and the fortunes of France were changed. They did not listen to that eager voice in the counsels of Metz or in the camp at Nevers; and—well, no one can say it would have saved them if they had. But, who knows?

Heaven gives sometimes—just a man. They accepted the soldier Buonaparte; they rejected another, whose patriotism was at least as fervent, whose motives were as pure.

And Victor left the camp at Nevers, threw up his commission, and is in fated Paris now. He is very weary with travel and excitement; his courage for the moment seems gone. He sank back on the sofa; his head fell again upon his arm. The grave, concentrated expression of pain and eagerness left his delicate face; it became gradually calm, sweet, and childlike, and in his weariness—he fell asleep.

The evening spring sunshine gilded the room again, as it had done an evening or two before as Père Dax had lain and dropped asleep there too; and the room was silent, but for the twitter of birds beyond the casement, who sang and cooed in the brightness of the opening year, all unconscious that it was a spring of sadness and a year of mourning for France.

He slept on as the sun sank; he was quite worn out, and he did not move even when a hand touched the door, when it opened, and Faustine entered the room.

She came over to him; she thought he was leaning there weary; she paused as she saw he

was asleep. She clasped her hands and watched, as the low, regular breathing came from between his parched lips as he lay in the calm slumber of a child.

She paused,—her dark handsome face softened and quivered and melted,—and he still lay unconscious there, and slept softly, while she stood by him and watched.

They were all alone in that great desolation—all alone of all the old friends of St. Marteau and the Rue St. Clive; all alone,—just these two.

He did not move as she knelt down and looked close into his face; she sighed as she scanned it. She had not seen him since that march from Paris, in the glorious days of last July. She had not seen him during all these months of war, during all these gaunt days when she and the *petit père* had been here in Paris, suffering famine and siege. And his face was altered,—pale as hers was pale, worn as hers was worn. The stamp was set deep upon the cheek of both—the stamp of national suffering, of a people's agony and woe.

The face looked very delicate; her eyes softened to tenderness as they rested on its quiet sweetness now.



“How he sleeps!” she murmured. “Poor boy, —like a weary child.”

She rose and shut the window; she took up a light shawl, and threw it over him. She bent again, and knelt gazing by his side.

“Victor, Victor!” the words broke from her; and the strong, passionate love of her life for him swept in a cloud of feeling over her dark face.

How she had loved! This strange girl,—how through years of her turbulent, feverish life he had been the softness of her womanhood, the idol of her devotion hidden within her strong heart.

“Victor!” How her heart had sunk again and again with terror for his sake; how it glowed now with wild hope that the hour of his triumph might be yet to come! For dark words had been spoken at Père Dax’s funeral that day, and dark schemes were projected. There was work for him when he woke now, all ready to be done.

Let him rest, for he was weary, she thought. For the moment, let him sleep; for there would be no more rest in that night for him. His part was ready. The roll of the cannon would be heard again before long, as the troops wound, in new-formed columns, towards Montmartre. Let him sleep!

She bent over him. Those proud lips, that had

never suffered yet the touch of love, bent low now, and trembled close to his fair hair and over his pale forehead. The dark eyes, that had answered again and again with flashes of angry scorn to many a glance earnest and appealing, now softened with a light of ineffable tenderness as they rested on his unconscious face; and her whole nature seemed changed and bathed in soft womanhood, as she hung with the eagerness of a devotion at once passionate and protective over him, for whom her wild heart had broken itself with love.

Victor's face was strangely calm and happy. He was dreaming, not of France, nor of her bleeding children. Peace had chased tumult from his heart for the time being, the cloud of shame and horror had rolled away, and his dreaming spirit was wandering where *she* knew not, but wandering with one *he* loved.

In the vision that was bringing that smile to his lips, that soft light over his face, he saw eyes dear to him that were far away, he heard a low voice sweet and loving, and he was all unconscious for one happy hour of France and her troubles, of Paris and her delirious life, and alike of Faustine kneeling close to him, with that passionate tenderness in her dark fervent eyes.

She bent low, for her heart was full and overpowered her. There was the emotion of their meeting; there was the agony of apprehension that the future might bring a quick farewell. She bent over him; she put her hand up and pushed the fair curls back from his pale temples, as she drew the shawl close to his shoulder; for the darkening evening drew chill.

"*Mon bien aimé!*" she whispered, "how I have loved you; how long, how truly, how well! and—you *never* knew it! You think me great as you are—as single in my patriotism, as undivided in my love of France. *Mon bien aimé!* and you are my France, you my glory, you the secret of my patriotic love; and—you *never* knew it!

The words were half thought, half murmured, as she stayed there, and the twilight fell over them and the time went on.

"You were too great always—always," she continued, "for idle love. You were ever patriot, single and undivided, in your patriotic love. Ah! and I,—the strongest among all of them, as men used to say—I have been weak, so weak, through all these years. God knows how weak, how suffering; for I have loved as women love, Victor—I have loved you."

She put her hand softly on his shoulder.

“Am I to blame?” she murmured. “Could I have known you—and *not* love you,—greatest, noblest, best? But I do not repine that you never loved *me*. I am but a weak, weak woman, and I loved you truly, Victor; but—*your* love was—France!”

She paused in her thought, in her murmured words; she looked at him, her hand still lying on his shoulder.

He moved slightly; his shoulder was drawn back; and as he turned her hand touched something—something that, in his sleep and in his restless movement, fell from its hiding-place around his neck. It was cold, hard, glittering; her fingers clutched it. It was a woman’s delicate, fragile chain. She drew it forth,—and, a pallor, deadlier than when the Prussian cannon had roared round her, overspread her face.

A fierce tremor shook her kneeling frame; she set her teeth in her quivering lip, and her eyes gleamed with the fury of a tigress, as she drew forth slowly the fragile glittering thing.

It was a long chain of daintily twisted cable. She drew it through her fingers, and in one instant the locket with its monogram lay in her hand. She knew the secret of a woman’s jewellery, and instantly she detected the tiny spring; she

touched it, the lid sprang open, and her eyes rested on the fair young face within.

She looked but one second; then she sprang to her feet, mad with her agony of awakened jealousy, furious at the discovery, so unexpected, so unforeseen. Her blood had been fevered by many a fearful excitement through these months gone by: it seemed fired with a terrible delirium now; she became unconscious of what she said or did; she lost all self-control.

She stood up, she started back from him, and with an angry wrench, and with the strength that her passion gave her, she tore the delicate chain from his neck.

He awoke instantly. He started, and looked for one moment astonished from side to side. Then he put up his hand eagerly to his neck; he felt for his treasure,—it was gone. Then his glance turned upon Faustine.

She stood there some paces from him, her eyes glaring on him full of fury, her cheek crimson with excitement, the fragments of his broken chain in her outstretched hand.

He did not understand,—not even *then*. But he saw that she was angry; and the thought that came first was, that *he* had dropped, and *she* had found his chain.

He rose and came towards her, and she started still further back.

“Give me that, Faustine,” he said in a soft tone.

“Give it to you!” she exclaimed. “Give it to you, traitor, deceiver! I hate you. After all, then, you, you, you, Victor—are just like the rest!”

“What do you mean?” he answered. “Give me the locket, Faustine. It is the most precious thing I have on earth. Take care, do not injure it!” he exclaimed, for she made as if she would have dashed it on the ground. “Faustine, what do you mean? Where did you find it?”

“You have deceived me!” she continued. “You concealed this, and you pretended—and I thought—you——”

“What are you saying? I concealed nothing. Whom have I deceived? I would have told you—I meant to tell you; but since you and I have met again, alas! there has been enough around us to forbid all mention of our private interests or concerns. Give it to me, Faustine.”

She glared upon the locket again, and upon the sweet delicate countenance it encased.

“I should have soon told you,” he said again. “Look at her; is it not the most angel-face you have ever seen?”

"I hate her!" she cried, stamping her foot in bitter anger, and clenching the locket in her hand. "Who is she? I hate her! You shall never have it again. I hate her! Oh, God! oh, horrors! you have deceived me! I hate her—I hate her, I say!"

"Are you mad?" he said gently, looking with a weary expression of wonder into her face.

"Mad! Yes, I dare say you think me mad. Perhaps I am; we are all mad, I think, in this Paris. God! we have had enough to make us so. And now, oh, Victor!" She looked at him for one softened moment, her lips quivering, her eyes brimful of burning tears, then she clenched her teeth suddenly again.

She dashed the fragile locket from her; she turned, and sank on a seat by the little table, her face buried in her hands. She was weeping bitterly now: she was not patriot at this moment; she was but a woman loving and heart-broken, her pride quite overwhelmed by the anguish of disappointed love.

Victor picked up his locket, and hid it carefully away. Then he came over to her; he put his hand upon her shoulder, and bent over her in the gentle brotherly way he always had with her.

"Faustine," he said, "what is it? You are

broken down with fatigue; you are worn out. What is it?—tell me.”

His voice, speaking in his low, soothing accent, scorched her heart like fire.

“Go!” she exclaimed—“go,—leave me! Will you not go?” She shook his hand from her shoulder.

“Faustine!” he pleaded again.

She looked up at him, her dark eyes glittering strangely through her tears.

“Go!” she exclaimed again. “Do you not see I want to be alone? Why do you stay? Do you think I like you to see me in this way? Go!” she repeated—“go!”

Her head sank again: he bent over her.

“I cannot leave you,” he said, “I cannot. We are alone—only you and me, of all the old friends; and to-day of all days, Faustine, I cannot leave you. Rest: you are worn and weak. Rest here, and let me speak to you. I want to tell you of her—all about her. You are the first one I would wish to know.”

She shuddered.

“I do not want to hear anything. I hate her, I tell you; I hate her! Go!—will you not go?”

“What do you mean? Listen to me. Look, I am suffering too. This is a terrible time for all



of us—and for her, Faustine. Let me tell you : she is so far away ; and God knows we are parted far enough, and it may be for ever. Have you no sympathy to give me, my sister—my old faithful friend ?”

She shuddered again, and shook his touch from her shoulder.

“I cannot, I cannot ! Go, Victor, go !”

“You are shocked with me. This is not a time, you think, to speak of private interests and of our hidden hearts’ love. True, Faustine, that is why I never spoke to you before. But now, at this moment, while there is a pause, and we are tired both of us, and we have come back together from that dear grave, listen to me ; forget bloodshed and horror for one moment. Give me the comfort of your woman’s sympathy and your sister-love. Faustine, my heart faints when I think of her. Give me courage ; give me comfort ; give me hope.”

“I cannot, Victor, I cannot !” she broke out again ; and she covered her face to weep bitter tears.

“You are worn out : what is it ? Tell me. Look up at me, my sister.”

“Go, Victor !” she exclaimed again. Go, go !—will you not leave me ?”

"I cannot," he said.

Then—suddenly she looked up at him. He was standing there still by her, silent, sorrowful, patient. He did not speak after his last words, until at length—she looked up.

Through the burning tears, her eyes met his, and—she could not suppress it—it broke out in her gaze at last, that light of infinite, eager tenderness, of jealous, passionate love; it met his eyes at last.

It flashed with a new light upon his heart; it spoke in that silent moment the bitter secret of her feverish heart and soul.

He looked down on her, he drew his hand from her shoulder; his lips quivered strangely, and his eyes softened as he met that sweet wild light in hers.

"Victor, Victor!" she said softly, a full confession in the whispered words—confession as unreserved as if death stood really between them, and this parting was to be their last.

And a low exclamation broke from his lips.

"Faustine," he said in tones full of earnest tenderness and of eager, compassionate brother's love—"Faustine—that I had guessed this—years and years ago!"

"How could you!" she said impatiently, as she covered her crimson cheeks again with her hands.

“Faustine—my sister!”

“Hush! do not make me mad again,” she said.

He stood silent then, and immovable for a moment, looking at her with a gaze full of earnest sorrowful affection and of tender pity. His heart was breaking with compassion for her, and he felt stunned for a moment with the mingled astonishment and regret at the revelation that had broken upon him with such sudden force. He looked at her as she wept on in bitterness. It seemed terrible—in the midst of this great desolation they were so utterly alone. She was so bereft and friendless; and he had mistaken her so fatally through all these years, that in her sorrow and bereavement he could be of little comfort now.

“Faustine,” he murmured again.

Then he drew near her, and, standing close by her side, took one hand that had fallen listless, while the other was clasped over her eyes. He took it into his, and raised it with gentle reverence to his lips.

“Faustine—my dear sister.”

She could not answer him; she shuddered again violently as he spoke; she turned her face further away, and she drew her hand from his clasp.

He stood still by her, silent again, an expres-

sion of intense pain coming over his face. It lingered there for a moment ; he looked perplexed and wearied out with emotion and pain. Then he brightened, a sad, softened look gleaming in his eyes. He touched her hand once more, and this time she was quieter, and let it lie unresistingly in his.

“Faustine,” he said again, “does it much matter—as we stand now—as all these bright, sweet things of our life seem fading into a shadowy past—as we plunge into our destiny, fixed and inevitable? Weep for *her* : you and I are still united—sister and brother—in the same cause together. Together we have lived, Faustine ; together—we shall die.”

She looked up, and caught his hand for a moment, in proud exultation, and dashed her burning tears away.

“Yes,” she exclaimed ; “*she* cannot have you ! You belong to France.”

“I do,” he said gravely ; “none knows it better than she does.”

“She ! pale-faced Englishwoman, what does she know of us ? You are ours, Victor ; you are a sworn, devoted son of the people, soldier of the republic, child of France ; you are ours !”

“I know it,” he said, bending his head again.

Faustine, you are weary and excited ; my sister, rest. To-morrow, we have still work to do."

"We have!" she cried. "Paris shall be free yet. The cursed enemy shall be driven from her gates. Ah! Victor, I am no woman such as you love, am I? I am no sweet-eyed gentle daughter of a tranquil race. Ah! but you are mine—mine and the republic's. Yes; we will fight together, as you say. Away with such themes of trivial sentiment, unworthy our nation, our cause, and the hour. You are right, Victor; she shall never have you—the pale-faced English girl. You belong to France. Ah! to-morrow we shall be in arms again; to-morrow we shall renew the struggle. Paris shall be delivered; France shall yet be free; and you are ours. You belong to the Commune—to the Red Republic—to France."

Victor shook his head sadly, and turned slightly away; and, at that moment,—sounds were heard below. Footsteps trod the staircase,—the door burst open,—and a group of men,—including many old acquaintances, entered the room.

"Ah! all is ready," one cried. "Here you are! The cannon rolls to Montmartre; the Prussians leave the town with the dawn of the morning; the people are under arms. But one decisive step to-morrow, one lion-spring, and

Paris is in the hands of the Commune ; Prussia and Versailles are alike defied, and the glorious flag of liberty will float upon the ramparts. Paris will belong at last to the Parisians ; Paris will be free !”

Old talk ; idle, vain, frothing words, but  
fraught with new significance in these strange  
latter days.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

“What hast thou done, O France, that this should be  
An hour thus clothed with blood and woe to thee?  
Thou hast seen many a blood-red hour before this one.  
What art thou that thy lovers should misdoubt?  
What is this hour, that it should cast *hope* out?—  
For hope turns back from thee. What hast thou done?  
Thou hast done ill against thine own soul. Yea,  
Thine own soul hast thou slain, and burnt away  
Thine own life and creation of thy fate.  
Thou’st set thine hand to unmake—to *discreate*.”

ALGERNON SWINBURNE.

Two months more, and then that was over.

The red flag had waved over Paris; and its followers had done their horrid work.

It was lowered, and the troops of the Tricolor were filing along the Route de Neuilly from Versailles.

What a time it had been, that second siege!—a time of horrors far worse than the first. What a scene was Paris in that beautiful month of May!

The lurid glare rose night and day from her

burning buildings: the city streamed with the blood of her ill-fated children; the smoke rolled dense and thick from the petroleum-flames of her conflagration, and cannon and shell poured in a ceaseless cataract from every side; and within—in the counsels of the Commune, in the ranks of the army, in the Hôtel de Ville, were treachery, cowardice, horrid cruelty, and diabolic deeds.

And yet—and yet the children of the red flag rose to defend Paris, to make one more struggle for the freedom of France. With this motive, and in that vain hope, many joined them, casting themselves into the terrible and hopeless breach.

Victor Lescar joined them, and others, who were of brave and indomitable spirit like him.

He joined them on the 18th of March, and accepted command of the Buttes Montmartre. He struggled with the hopeless disorder, the wild undisciplined spirit of his forces, for many a day. His name was on the list of the candidates for the Communal Assembly at the elections at the Hôtel de Ville.

His blood was fired with hope, with the excitement of his new position, with the wild dream that France might yet be conqueror—that from Paris might issue an organized army, inspired



with new spirit, powerful to reclaim or—ready to die.

He threw himself into the work, and strove with heart and soul to make delusion reality. Terrible delusion!—fatal dream! What could the result be but bitter disappointment and the anguish of despair?

These followed each other in quick succession. First came the murder of Lecomte and Clement Thomas, thrilling his soul with indignation and disgust. Then the conduct of the Committee; the unveiled character of many members of the Commune; the dissipation, the treachery, and cruelty of Raoul Regnau, who held a triumphant position as Préfet of Police and administrator of the Council of the Salut Publique; the horror that followed from the conduct of all.

Then the failure of their *sorties*, the fury of their baffled leaders, the demoralisation of their troops. Worse, worse; all growing daily worse.

Then, swift following each other, came the loss of their best generals—the few who were gallant and brave.

Then bitter, terrible, dark days, while the Council of the Salut Publique, under Raoul Regnau and Pytat, did their horrid work; then the treacherous command of the American general, Nauserette,

who had sown many of these seeds of sorrow in the prison of St. Pélagie during days gone by.

Then days of horror and deeds of darkness, while Paris streamed with blood.

The sunny month of May came, and the chestnuts flowered in the gardens, and the sun shone, and the birds sang in the Tuileries; and, against the soft blue summer sky, the flames rose and the smoke curled in black sulphureous columns from the burning homes of ruined Paris, from the Tuileries, the Palais Royal, the beautiful Hôtel de Ville. Paris was crumbling into ruin.

Finally, the column in the Place Vendôme fell; it was nearly over then.—The cannonade continued vigorously from the army of Versailles, and in a few days the troops marched unresisted down the Avenue de Paris, and forced their way by the entrance of the Point du Jour into the town.

Madness raged wilder than ever in the brains of these people of Paris. Petroleum was flung; flames rose higher and higher to the heavens; on all sides were buildings crumbling to the ground; blood flowed unceasingly; the dead crowded the streets; the troops advanced nearer and nearer; the red flag was torn down; the tricolour waved on point after point of the ramparts of the city—and the Commune was no more.

It lived long enough to stamp its memory of horror upon the pages of human history; it lived long enough for the deed of one dark day—it lived to murder the hostages, to alienate its own followers, to horrify the very men who carried arms in its cause.

On that day Victor broke his colonel's sword, and flung it from him, and would fight for the Commune no more. The delusion was gone long before that; the fatal mistake of that step in his life had become apparent from a very early day. But he still clung long to these frantic efforts at reformations—to the old false ideal of the Cause they served.

He struggled against the deeds of the Communal Assembly, against the decision of the committee of the "Salut Publique." He raised his voice in remonstrance; he strove vainly to stifle the poison that FERMESCH and BOUCHET poured forth from their horrid press. He clung to hope, he clung to the cause of his ideal, until the day when, at the prison of La Roquette, the murder was achieved of the Archbishop of Paris, of the Abbé Deguerry, of the President BONJEAN.

Then his soul sank, sickened with horror, and he flung his sword away.

It was near the end then. The troops of

Versailles were fast entering Paris, and the city was in flames.

He had heard the order given; he knew the dark deed about to be committed. In vain he had raised his voice in passionate expostulation; then, mad with despair and horror, he had fled from the Assembly and rushed into the streets.

Shots resounded in the air all around him; shell and cannon-ball rolled heavily above his head; the atmosphere was poisoned with the horrid smell of blood and smoking sulphureous fires. The cries of the people rang in a hideous ceaseless echo in his ears, the flames roared towards the blue heavens, and the black smoke rolled against the summer sky.

And here in a little corner, a picturesque bit of old Paris, where he paused a moment as he fled madly he knew not where, the sun filled the street with soft golden rays, and the broad eaves of an old doorway made a rich shadow upon the stone.

He leaned under it a moment, weary, scarce knowing where to go. He would not fly, he would not desert the cause he had adopted; and to stay with it, to belong to it, was a bitter shame.

Ah! would no bullet reach him?—no burning

brand fall upon his head ? Would not death take him, as it took thousands and thousands round him, and hide him from his dishonour and despair ?

He leaned there, his arms folded, his head sunk upon his breast ; and the roll of the cannon echoed around him, and the ceaseless horrid rattle of the rifle-shot, and the cries of the populace, and the crackle of the burning city, and the dull roar of the flames.

The wall against which he leaned was riddled with shot. The clematis and scarlet creeper, just bursting into spring flower, hung from the broken wall ; the porch was tottering, the house was empty, the inhabitants perished or gone. Only the birds sang still as the sun shone ; they twittered in the branches of a laburnum that raised its golden flowery head in the little court beyond the ruined wall.

He leaned against it, broken down with anguish and despair.

It was a quiet corner : the roar of the shouting voices and the crackling fire and ringing shot was a little distant. He had fled from it all ; his eyes could not bear the horrid sight. Where should he go ? What could he do for Paris—for her bleeding and perishing multitudes—for her dishonour and her shame ? Failure, failure ;

his life had been a failure. It had been all delusion—all pursuit of a false ideal. Peace! Brotherhood! Universalism!—and it had come to this.

Oh, Paris! Oh, France! Oh, delusion, defeat, and despair!

He had stood for a moment or for an hour,—which, he was quite unconscious,—when a footstep, coming towards him, trod suddenly the hot pavement, and its sound roused him as it reached his ear.

It approached: he looked up. Rapidly, steadily, eagerly she came along—Faustine, the red flag upon her shoulder, the fire of fanatic fury glowing upon her face.

She was rushing, he knew not where—from some point where she had waved her fatal standard to some other where she thought it might still with hope be raised.

And she drew near him. They had not met often during the last two months. She had been playing her part; he had been struggling with his. Her party had been in power all this time; she had been reigning as a queen in the red Commune. He had last seen her riding by Raoul Regnaud, on the day of the proclamation of the Assembly, through the streets of Paris on a

white charger, with a laurel wreath on her brows.

She was a leading spirit in those days of tumult, and seemed fired with a power that was at once fatal and insane.

She rushed along now, waving her red flag, passing Victor unheeded, and speeding swiftly down the street.

Another moment and she would have been gone. But something impelled him; he called "Faustine," and she instantly paused.

The voice reached her, and she turned and looked at him as he stood there. She came slowly towards him. The sun-rays fell between them: she paused a moment some paces away. She looked with that strange glitter of madness in her excited eyes.

"Faustine, Faustine!" he cried again.

"Victor!" she answered, and again she paused.

The flag dropped from her shoulder, her eyes softened as they rested wistfully on his face; she held out her hands to him, she drew near him, and her lips parted to speak again, but again suddenly—she paused.

What is coming? Hark! the rush of many footsteps, shouts of the people, the crash of falling

houses ; the ring of rifle-shot draws nearer, nearer, and still more near. One second, one rush, and the street is full of the flying populace and the charging soldiers of Versailles.

She turns, she waves her red flag ; Victor starts forward, and looks wildly round. Good God ! they are firing on the people, they are driving them before them like sheep ; they are pouring their shot into the sun-lit streets, and the children of Paris are falling like the corn beneath the reapers' hand.

Ah ! that flying struggling mass ; it was too awful. Many fell smitten at their feet ; a few streamed past them and fled on.

He shouts ; he waves his hand.

" Courage, mes amis ! " she cries, as she rears her flag ; and, firm and unshrinking, the two stand side by side.

The flying crowds troop past them ; the soldiers are near ; rifles are levelled, and scores of fixed bayonets are advancing close on them. They shout to the flying people : they stand firm. She waves the red flag ; he wears the uniform of the National Guard.

It was more than enough—far more. The soldiers were near them now. A moment and one rifle is raised. A soldier of Versailles, he



but does his duty ; he bent his aim on that uniform of the Commune.

An instant—a shout—the sharp crack of the rifle ringing high above the rest, and, higher than all, there rends the summer air the bitter echo of a woman's cry, as the red flag fell forgotten on the pavement, and Faustine sprang towards Victor,—as the tumult dies away, and the smoke clears, and *he* is seen to stand there untouched, unwounded, bearing the sinking form he has caught upon his breast. The bullet was meant for him ; but,—as she sprang forward,—it had pierced her in his stead.

The soldiers of Versailles still rush on them : he is their prisoner. They surround him, and she is torn roughly from his arms.

“ Ha, ma foi ! ma belle pétroleuse ! ” cried the rough tones. “ En avant, mon ami, en avant ! ”

She is dead, apparently ; well, thousands are dead in that city, besides her, to-day. What matter ? Fling her rudely aside. He is their prisoner,—away !

But he wrenches himself from their grasp ; he springs forward as that beautiful form, that grand dark face, pallid with the grey hue of death, is laid low upon the ground. He utters a bitter cry, as he struggles to free himself from

his captors and reach her side. In vain : they lay rough hold on him ; a dozen rifles point close to his head,—a moment, one struggle more, and all were over for him as well.

But another voice is raised at that moment, and there springs suddenly forward from the ranks of Versailles a young officer in the rich uniform of the old Cent Gardes.

He darts by Victor, and, with a cry of bitter sorrow, he flings himself by Faustine's side.

"Ah!" he cries, "the rose—the damask rose of the Place St. Etienne! Faustine—the fairest flower of Paris! Faustine—have they slain you too? Go," he continued, turning upon his soldiers, "leave me; take him prisoner. I will follow you. Go."

"Eugène de Valéry!" exclaimed Victor.

"Lescar, mon ami. Ah, Dieu!——"

He sprang towards his old friend for one moment. But it was unsafe to say more.

"Go," he cried, and they hurried on from him; and he bent again, and wound his arm round Faustine's unconscious form.

"She is not dead," he murmured; "no," and he listened eagerly as the faint breath fluttered on her lips. "There is time—there is time. I may save her still. Ah! the damask rose!

Ah ! la belle ! Ah ! Faustine, has hell broken loose upon earth ? ”

He wound his strong arms round her, he raised her from the earth, and he bore her along swiftly through the deserted back streets, while the flames still roared, and the cannon growled, and the shots rang, while the populace fell and perished, or shouted and fled.

He bore her along until the Avenue de Boulogne was passed, and burning Paris behind them ; he bore her until he reached the Point du Jour, where stood the Ambulance of Versailles.

“ *She can save her,* ” he murmured, as he sped along, “ *if any can. She will save her, surely,* ” he continued, as his eyes turned to the pallid face upon his shoulder, as his arm trembled under the unconscious weight he bore. “ *She will save her for France !* ”

He reached the Ambulance ; he carried her in ; he laid her on a low pallet, and bent over her beautiful dark face with drops of horror and anguish upon his own.

“ *Has it come to this !* ” he murmured again. “ *We shoot brothers, sisters ; we shoot right and left ; we shoot our loves, we kill our flowers of beauty—the very women for whom we could have given our lives.* ”

He stayed till he saw kind eyes bending over Faustine with eager concern. He stayed till he could give his charge to those who he knew would care for her. He committed her with sorrowing words of despair.

“There was not one man,” he said, “in that company who would not have given the best blood in his heart for Faustine, our rose, our darling,—our damask rose, our dark beautiful queen. Has hell broken loose, I say?—have we all become devils? Take care of her,” he uttered again, ere he left her. “Save her for Paris; save her, save her, if you can.”

Then he went his way again, back to Paris.

“She will be saved, if anything can save her,” he murmured again, as he hurried to his post. “Faustine! the beautiful rose of the Place St. Etienne. Ah, horrors! Thank God, who is merciful, she is in good hands now.”

And so she was; for the face that bent over Faustine, as she lay unconscious, with the grey pallor of death upon her cheek, was the kind earnest countenance of Madame Prioleau.

## CHAPTER XIX.

“Stone walls do not a prison make,  
Nor iron walls a cage;  
Minds innocent and quiet take  
That for a hermitage.  
If I have freedom in my love,  
And in my soul am free,  
Angels alone that soar above,  
Enjoy such liberty.”

ROBERT LOVELACE.

It was said that, after this, to enter Paris was like visiting a city of the dead.

Men who had not been there since the bright days of the summer months of last year, and returned to it now, found there a change, a desolation, terrible beyond words.

Men walked along the swept and desolate streets, and asked for friend after friend; for aged people who had been dropping gently into peaceful graves; for young bright creatures they had last seen smiling in the promise of youth; for mothers, for children, for women, for men: it was the same answer for all—dead!

Some fallen in the sorties before the Prussians ; shot down in the last mad struggle of the days of the Commune ; perished with hunger and disease ; but gone—gone !

Faces dear and familiar, young and old, good and evil, perished alike.

It was strange and terrible to find sunny corners in that fair city, where one had seen the bright fire crackling on the hearthstone of some happy home, where the smiles of children had been familiar, where old age had sat in honoured peace,—to go there and see the charred and falling house, the desolate hearth exposed through the chasms in the broken wall, the paper hanging torn and ragged, the empty, wretched desolation and despair.

There were thousands of such homes in Paris in that summer-time,—thousands of such deserted hearths,—thousands of such perished and ruined lives.

Such is always the work of war. Such had been, alas ! in Paris the work of worse than war—of frenzy, of deception, of bloodthirsty ruffianism, of horrors untold.

Whence had it all come ? Whence came the bloodshed of '93 ? Whence came the horrors of that first Revolution ? Trace the tale of the days

of Marat and Danton and of the Paris Commune, —in many salient points they seem strangely alike.

A suffering people, a poisonous spiritual food ; the starving inhabitants of 1793 and the gospel of Jean Jacques Rousseau. A people still in suffering ; and a modern philosophic gospel culled from Rousseau, St. Simon, Proudhon, combined and helped by writers like Regnau and Rochecarre, thinkers like Becker and Karl Franx, and leaders like Chauserette or Bergeret.

One writer has called death “the great standing discouragement of humanity.” But on death there shines always a soft gleam of hope. There are facts of society that seem far more discouraging—those questions of unbalanced riches and poverty, of good and evil, misery and happiness, —questions that, when left unanswered, are solved by society periodically for itself.

They had remained unanswered, and, worse, uncared for, through many a year in Paris, and the people had been satisfied with that evil mental food ; with lies calling themselves philosophy, with delusions promising to produce something real and true. The Commune was the result.

And now it was over, and the city was desolate. It had been swept by cannon, consumed by fire,

wasted by famine; its children had perished in its midst, and men who paced her dreary streets now, looked round as if in some hideous dream.

Piers Ashton felt thus, as, immediately the second siege was raised, the Commune over, and Paris in the hands of the government of Versailles, he entered the city to seek eagerly for that friend dear to him as a brother and for many an old associate of past sunny days.

He sought in vain. He rushed, frenzied with dismay and terror, here and there. A shell had carried the roof from the old house in the Place St. Etienne during the last bombardment, since the death of Auber Dax.

There was nothing to be heard of them, nobody to question, there.

His old hotel in the Rue Rivoli was a hospital, full from ceiling to basement with wounded soldiers—a terrible scene of suffering and death.

He scoured Paris, as many did in those days, to seek vainly for his friends. He had been there after the first siege; he had seen Victor frequently in the camp or on the field during the course of the war. With many other Englishmen who acted likewise, he went to and fro on the scenes of action, serving the fallen and wounded, carrying provisions to the starving



villagers, enlisting sometimes in one relief corps, sometimes in another. His energies and his fortune for the last year had been devoted utterly to the suffering armies of both Germany and France. He had come over to Paris with food-supplies, an emissary from many a kind heart in Britain after the first siege, and had just left the city when the gates were closed again and the last terrible act in the bloody tragedy had begun.

He had lingered about Versailles, but had not achieved an entrance, and had never succeeded in reaching his old haunts until now. And now, as the smoke rolled away and the fires died slowly in the fated city, he came at length to find these haunts deserted, empty, or burnt to the ground.

He was sick with horror and dismay as he paced the streets, as he sought his friends here and there in vain. He went from hospital to hospital; he asked for name after name he had known in former times—names he thought might be links in the tracing chain towards his friend. In vain he asked; dead they seemed all of them, fallen in a sortie, shot in the street, perished of their wounds, died of disease,—all gone.

He went at last to Versailles: the prisoners were crowded there. The Communists, all who

had not been shot in that entrance into the city, were huddled together like flocks of condemned sheep in sheds on the plains of Satory and in the impromptu prisons of the Orangerie now.

The rapid trials in the riding-school of the palace had already begun.

Piers went to a friend whose name he found high in authority in the Versailles council, and from him he at last obtained a pass of permission to enter for inquiry among the prisoners.

The lists were being still made up,—their interminable length was increasing every hour; the lists of these men, women, and children, rebels, “incendiaires” and “pétroleuses”—a dense throng, as doomed, every one of them, as their brothers and sisters of Paris who had fallen in her blood-stained streets.

He obtained sufficient influence to gain permission to scan that fatal list, eagerly, breathlessly, fearfully, but at last with a cry of joy. Yes, there it was—the name he had loved through many a year,—the name of his friend, his companion, through days of study, through years of travel, through wanderings of thought. He lived still: he was a prisoner, and appointed for trial; as good as condemned, but he lived. His name was on that list—Victor Lescar.

But there was no Faustine,—she was still un-found; and Henri Tolberg and old Colonel De Lescar, and Bouchet and Luchêne and Rochecarre—God only knew where they all were.

Then followed many weeks when the trials in the riding-school went on, and the dismal executions at Satory began; and all through those weeks Piers was struggling for permission to penetrate those dread prison walls, and to look on the face of that friend he loved, but all in vain.

Many weeks passed, and many trials were over, and many a Communist sent to his account, before, at length, through influence won for him by Sir John Graeme from high quarters at home,—at last the permission came. He might visit Victor for a single hour.

It was one of those moments of life in which every power of intense and contending emotion seems compressed into one throb of pain, when the door opened, at the end of the long dreary passage, and Piers and Victor stood once more face to face.

He was sitting at his little table when Piers entered, catching the last ray of light that fell through the grated window high up in the wall.

He sat bending over his writing ; a confusion of books, and maps, and papers lay before him ; and, as the door opened, he did not move.

He thought it only his accustomed visitor—only the gaoler with his portion of evening food—and he sat still, his fair head bending close and eager over his table, his fingers moving rapidly across the extended map.

A hand on his shoulder, and he had sprung instantly to his feet ; and then he saw, through the dim and dusky light, who stood beside him. A moment he gazed, half realising, half startled ; and then his lips quivered with the nervous tremor of a woman, his eyes brightened, his face, so wan and pale, flushed with a vivid colour as he stretched forth both his hands, and, with one broken cry of joy, fell forward, and his head dropped on his friend's broad breast.

“ My friend, my brother ! ” he exclaimed.

“ Victor at last ! My God, at last ! ”

They wrung each other's hands again and again in intense and speechless agitation.

Such moments are too strong, too deep, for words ; and then Victor sank on the wooden chair again, leaned his arms upon the back, and looked up for a moment, with an expression of unspeakable love and gratitude, into the dark face that

bent over him, all quivering with tenderness and regret.

There seemed still no words to say. Victor's lips moved as if to speak, but they only trembled. He struggled for an instant, and then he turned away and leaned his elbows on the table, covered his face with his hands, and his frame shook with the fierce effort for self-possession. Piers could only lay his hand on his shoulder, and look down upon him, and wait.

"Oh, Piers," he said at length, "to see you again! Look away from me; leave me a moment. I am ashamed of my weakness; but I feel as if I could have borne *anything* better than the face of a friend."

"Dear fellow!" Piers murmured.

"Sit down, Piers. There, it is over now. You came so suddenly, and it is so long since I have seen any face I love; not since—— O God! O God! how terrible it has been!"

"Terrible indeed!"

"Talk to me, Piers; tell me about every one, about all of them. First tell me, for God's sake, have you found Faustine?"

Piers shook his head.

"I cannot find a trace of her," he said.

Victor's head sank again.

"It is so, then; it is so. She is really dead; and yet——"

"Dead?" exclaimed Piers, in tones ringing with horror—"dead? Faustine!"

"I fear so, I fear so; and—she fell for me."

Piers heaved a low sigh, almost a sob; his heart was sick with horror of it all. And now Faustine too!

Victor looked up at him, with a deep colour on his cheek and a strange expression in his eyes as he spoke of her.

"Yes," he went on, "she must be dead, if you cannot find her. Poor brave, wild girl! True, strong-hearted to the last, Piers, she stood by my side in that terrible charge; she stood firm and true. I saw it, good God! I saw the soldiers fire; and it was *meant* for me. She must be dead; and yet I do not think so, for I heard Eugène de Valéry's words as they dragged me away. Stay; the Versailles hospital! Have you tried that? I know he would have carried her there. Eugène would have saved her, if there was any life to save. Seek her in the hospital at Versailles, Piers. God grant she may still be spared in life!"

"I will, I will. I never thought of going there. I have inquired in every possible place in

Paris—at every hospital, almost at every house : I never thought of Versailles.”

“Go there,” said Victor. “If she lives, she is in that hospital; Eugène would carry her there. Poor Eugène ! I wonder if he fell. There was fighting for hours after they took me. He may have been shot down ; but, if he lives still, find him out. Captain of the old Cent Gardes, he knows the fate of our poor Faustine.”

“It is all too dreadful,” Piers sighed ; “and, Victor, Victor, I have but a few minutes to be with you. Tell me of yourself : what is the prospect—what is the hope ? ”

“There is no hope,” said Victor firmly ; “the prospect has but one side. I stand accused, as deserter from the Government force, as defender of Montmartre, as war-delegate of the Commune, as member of the Assembly General. There is not the slightest hope.”

“Victor, Victor, there must be ! It is impossible ! ” exclaimed Piers in an agonized voice.

“Do not unnerve me,” said Victor. “My friend, I must be a man. But, ah ! ” he went on in a changed tone, “if I could only have fallen, Piers, as thousands did—died in the fierce heat of the struggle—it would have been easy enough ; but now it is hard to sit here and look forward

and look back—hard to live, to realise, to be left to be *condemned* to die.”

“Victor, it must not be, it cannot be; they must spare you; they cannot condemn you. What have you done?”

“Enough to earn condemnation, dear friend,” he said. “I did not mean it, Piers; God knows, I did not mean to share the dreadful deeds that were done; but I joined in the action that caused these deeds. I did desert the army of the Government. I was everything they accuse me of having been. In the eyes of military justice I deserve condemnation. I am prepared to die.”

“Victor, you! Impossible!”

“Friend, give me courage,” he said. “France has died, France has shed her best blood; why should mine be spared? Piers, I try not to think of it all, not to unnerve myself by the contemplation of all that must be. I am happy in here, in my own way—quite happy, I tell you, sometimes. I write: look, I have got so much ready. It will be left behind me; and perhaps, although my life has done so much harm, there may be a little good in what I am leaving here. And I have my maps—I can explain all I wished once so much that they would try to do; and I have here, Piers,” he continued, putting his hand



to the chain and locket that hung round his neck, —“I cannot speak of that yet—not of them, of her; but another day, when I am stronger, when you come again. I have things to say, but not now; no, I cannot now.”

He stopped a moment: even the slight reference had brought a deadlier pallor to his cheek—a tremor to his lip—a rush of tears to his eyes.

“I cannot speak of them to-day,” he continued, putting his hand up to his forehead with a weary movement; “but tell me in one word, are they well?”

“Well,” said Piers, bowing his head gravely; “both are well, both sad—sad, but well.”

“Look, send her this, will you? I have written it all for her; it is a great deal—quite a packet, but you will not mind. They would not allow me to send it before; but they will let you it with you, I know. Give it her. Sad—and I—— Oh, I cannot, cannot speak of her: I must be strong.”

“My friend, my friend,” cried Piers bitterly.

“Hush!” said Victor. “Stay! the time is nearly over; but you will come again, Piers?”

“Yes, I think they will let me. I will write to London to-night.”

“Will you? My love, oh, my love to her. What have I brought her but sadness? What has my life done but harm? It is well I should die; it is well.”

“Good God; you shall not die!” cried Piers; “you must not—it is impossible! Victor, they *cannot* do it.”

“They will,” he said gravely. “My friend, it is but a question of time. But come to me again, as often as they will let you. Only, Piers, do not unnerve me; be strong when you come, and make me strong. I must bear it; I must die as thousands have died. Why is it worse for me than for them? They all had friends—friends, and children, and parents, and dear, dear loves, and they all died; and we led them to death, and we inspired them to struggle; we must not shrink from death in our turn. But help me to be strong. Let us have happy hours together for the little while that remains. I *can* be strong, you see I can, save when I think of her, and when I think of Faustine, and when I remember—France.”

He would have said more, but a rough voice broke in upon them—

“*Messieurs, allons!* the time is up.”

And Piers must go.

Once more they wrung each other's hands, once more they looked with the passionate agony of wistful regret into each other's faces, and then the door was closed behind Piers, and he left his friend alone—alone in his dismal cell, alone with his books and his maps and his papers, alone, alas ! also, with sad memories, hopeless prospects, and vain regrets.

## CHAPTER XX.

“He was thy hope, thy joy, thy love, thine all ;  
And that last thought—that him thou could'st not save—  
Sufficed to kill,  
Burst forth in one wild cry, and all was still.  
Peace to thy broken heart and virgin grave.  
Ah ! happy ! but of life to lose the worst !  
That grief, though deep, though fatal, was thy first.”

ZULEIKA.

THE next morning Piers was standing in the bureau of the Versailles hospital, holding unexpected converse with a dear old friend—with Madame Prioleau, who had much to tell; nothing, however, but sad news.

Faustine was dead: the passionate heart was still; the eager fiery spirit was at rest. She had rallied, she had spoken, she had known Madame Prioleau; but then she had sunk again, and died.

And Madame Prioleau spoke of her with tears, but with peace also. She had felt, as Faustine sank asleep at last, that indeed it was well.

Madame Prioleau sat opposite Piers as she gave him her account, with her hands clasped in that

quiet way, with that composed strength of expression on her face—a face paled by the months of terrible exertion she had just passed through.

She spoke calmly and quietly, but there was none of the coldness of one hardened to the thought of suffering in her dark glowing eyes; they softened with intense sympathy, and they were dewy with tender tears, as she spoke of Faustine, and as she told her tale.

“It is well,” she said; “she is spared all results of her wild rash deeds; she is spared the disgraceful trial and all the terrible possibilities that might have ensued: she is at rest; and there was no other rest for her, for that restless nature, for that passionate heart, and—knowing all, as I now know, I cannot regret her—my poor Faustine.”

“You mean all of her history?”

“Of her heart,” Madame Prioleau answered. “Did you know, did any one know, what in these few days she unveiled to me?”

“*I* knew,” Piers said gravely; and he looked down on the ground, while a deep colour dyed his cheek. “I thought it long, long ago,” he went on, “but I never felt sure; perhaps only because I did not wish the assurance,” he added, as the memory swept over him of those old, old days, of the lesson he had learned of his heart and nature,

in that cynical *nil admirari* youth of his, from the beauty and the power of Faustine. He was silent—it seemed sacrilege now, to speak of the secrets of that heart that was still.

“I speak,” said Madame Prioleau, at length, answering as if she read his thoughts, “because you see *him*, and I, alas! may do so no more. She sent him her love, her last love, if he still lived to receive it, and the message of her faith in his King.”

“In his King?” repeated Piers.

“Yes: the end was great peace. She lit up wonderfully one night, and that was what she wished to say. ‘Victor was right,’ she exclaimed, ‘we must have a King;’ and she believed in Victor’s. She died in perfect confidence in the coming kingdom and the peace-bringing King.”

“Faustine! Faustine! Poor, beautiful Faustine!” Piers murmured.

Yes, it was very sad. She was very beautiful to the very end; and Eugène de Valéry and others, who found that she lay here, brought flowers, quantities of them, for their damask rose; and she lay at last covered with the rich scented profusion which young Valéry said she had always loved. But she did not notice them much: her mind was full of Victor; of old sayings of his; of

memories of long ago. It is always so at the end, you know, and it was well for her the immediate past faded entirely. There was no memory of latter scenes; no shadows of war, or horror of recollection, troubled her for an instant; it was all Victor, and love, and peace—all a sweet light on the future, all hope in a peaceful kingdom, all faith in a glorious King. Children of dream-land they have been, many of them, these strange lovers of the “Universal”—children of bright, tender dreams, and dreams so near the very highest truth, that as I watch them passing, many and many of them, in these latter days, it seems often to me that it is surely of *sublimest* truth they have caught a faint, fair gleam, and that it only needs the clearing away of the mists of mortality, and the vapours of earth, to make of their dream a most beautiful reality. The clouds are scattered, the dream fades as they pass away, and they look with hope, bright and satisfied, face to face at length upon the Truth. Surely they grope darkly for the New Jerusalem; they look for it upon earth, they strive passionately to build it out of earthly soil, and lo! it descendeth from heaven. It is that city which hath foundations; it is the city of God.

## CHAPTER XXI.

“The longer life, the more offence ;  
The more offence, the greater pain.  
Come, gentle Death, the ebb of care ;  
The ebb of care, the flood of life ;  
The flood of life, the joyful fare ;  
The joyful fare, the end of strife ;  
The end of strife, that thing wish I ;  
Therefore, come Death, and let me die.”

GEOFFREY CHAUCER.

THE next few weeks were, perhaps, in their influence upon his character and his future, the most telling in all Piers Ashton's life.

They were spent in watching that trial, in aiding, with futile effect, the efforts of sympathetic and eager friends ; spent in stirring up interest and concern for Victor on every possible side ; spent in writing those weary, painful letters to London ; spent in hurried short visits to Victor's cell.

The permission for these was still accorded to him ; but he gained nothing more.

He grew frantic with suspense and terror of



results, as time went on. He thought of every possible and impossible step; of an appeal to the British Government to win interference on Victor's behalf; of forcing himself into the council-chamber of Versailles, and flinging himself, to crave his friend's salvation, at the president's feet. Every kind of mad scheme occurred to him. He thought even of an effort to excite the exhausted populace to a forcible resistance in Victor's cause. Every sort of frantic idea crossed his mind, and each seemed alike in vain.

All his former lethargy and shyness and hesitation in action quite left him at this time, as he hurried hither and thither in Paris, making futile efforts for his friend.

Futile they continued to be.

Meantime these terrible trials went on; executions were the daily occurrence at Satory, and the railways were laden with prisoners transported to fortresses far and near. The Communist trials—they were the one subject of discussion, during that period of horror, in every paper, upon every side.

They were terrible months, these. Death reigned still in Paris, and the rifle-shot echoed with fatal regularity morning after morning in the far east.

Many deserved their fate : a single line could not be written in defence of those hordes of men, as desperate and bloodthirsty ruffians as ever made a nation's shame ; they paid but the just penalty of their guilty deeds upon the plains of Satory. Not a word in extenuation can be said for them ; not a shadow of censure is attached to their judges ; not a voice of protest can be raised as they are sent to their doom.

But—there was, here and there, one.

Was France so rich in brave blood, in spirits of chivalry, in brilliant talent, in military skill or distinguished literary genius, that she could afford to destroy such men as Victor Lescar ?

Apparently ; for Piers's utmost efforts and all friendly intercessions continued in vain.

His trial, his judgment, his condemnation came.

He was to die ; stern military justice demanded it : he must fall a sacrifice to the rigour of military etiquette and rule. Die, though stained by no foul crime of the Commune ; die, though his hands were pure of his brother-Frenchmen's blood. He must die !

Bitter was the anguish of Piers's heart through the futile struggles of these months. He struggled on, and public opinion was all with him ; even

the press, at home and abroad—in France, Germany, England, in all which countries Victor's name was known. The press protested: it was shocking, men said, that one so young, so brave, so gifted, should be doomed, like a felon, to die; horrible, that Lescar, whose defence (borne out by many a witness who would vouch for his tale) showed his short military career to have been one of devotion, brave, able, and efficient to his country's cause,—Lescar, the true patriotism of whose young spirit was shown in every line he had ever written, every deed he had ever done,—Lescar, whom none could accuse of any crime, save maddened and empoisoned love of France—he must die!

They tried, and condemned him.

During these bitter months, the most painful hours to Piers Ashton were always those spent over his letters to London—letters that could never carry any message, save the faintest encouragement to hope.

His sweetest hours, after the first shock of their meeting, were spent in that cell with Victor, where, as the officials grew to know him, he was allowed to linger for a more lengthened visit day by day.

Since the earliest time of their acquaintance

years ago at Cambridge, these two, with the strong constancy of a manly friendship, had clung to each other through chance and change, and had mingled, as life went on with both of them, many changing thoughts on men and things.

How times had changed; how life had changed! No wonder their thoughts had gained some altered colour too.

They talked often now of many an old theory, of many a delusive dream. They compared impressions formed from experience; they struggled to catch a sure, true light upon life. Of the keen pain of the parting in the near future they said little; of the deepest pain of all, the young heart in England, that was knit to Victor's in tenderest love, they never spoke but once. Victor could not do it; it was the one memory that unmanned him—the one thing in life of which the thought robbed him of his courage to die. They did not speak of her, but in silence Piers gave him her daily letters, and received his answers in return.

But of many other things they spoke; and many memories remained to linger with Piers through all his life to come, from many a scene in that dreary cell, and from many a conversation they had together there.

It was strange, interesting, and sad to watch,

day by day, the changeful vibrations of a spirit like Victor's, full of energy and activity of thought, and keenly sensitive and susceptible, during the solitude and sorrow of those dreary months.

Sometimes Piers found him bright and happy, absorbed in some curious train of speculation or thought, poring over his map, tracing out, perhaps, the prospective probabilities of national histories, marking out the parallel developments with pencil lines and enigmatical dottings, perfectly absorbed in his thoughts and occupations, oblivious for the moment of his own past, present, or—of that future, for him, so threatening and so near.

And Piers almost smiled to himself, in the midst of his own hopeless sadness, as he found himself obliged, as of old, directly his day's tidings had been delivered, to let himself drift, with as keen enjoyment as ever, into the bright current of Victor's thoughts, to enter, *malgré lui*, into his enthusiasm, and to listen to the clear, brilliant expositions which the young speculator had ready on some favourite idea. That versatile disposition, with its power of flinging itself eagerly, with utter absorption, into the moment's thoughts, was a gift at this time of infinite value

to Victor himself, and to any friend admitted to his society.

The working of his mind seemed, if possible, more rapid and more brilliant than ever, as he sat through those dreary hours, and waited through those solitary days.

He spoke much on military subjects, and wrote on them as well. He wished, he said, to leave some comprehensible explanation to the outer world that might justify the spirit and conduct of that handful of young officers who, with him, had protested, rebelled, and finally acted against the counsels and leadership of the generals at Metz, Tours, or Nevers.

“I wish men to know,” he said, “that there lives still a spirit of military honour in France. I wish men to feel certain that, though crushed and trodden to the ground, the standard of the French army is still honoured in the eyes of many thousands of her sons. I wish that men of other lands, who have looked on at this struggle, and witnessed our humiliation and our shame, could know how many brave and patriotic hearts there were in the army that fell like mown grass at Wörth and at Gravelotte, that endured and resisted at Strasbourg and in Paris, and that marched, covered with ignominy, out of Metz

with Bazaine. These things will be known some day and realised, and then men will confess that there is still bright hope for her future in the chivalry of France."

So he wrote often, as a soldier, in the heat and enthusiasm of his memories of that war; and in the same spirit he prepared an account of his own proposed deeds and line of action, if time had been spared him at the camp at Nevers. This was for his father; he finished, sealed, and gave it to Piers, to be delivered one day, if among the list of prisoners at Ehrenbreitstein was found the name of Alphonse de Lescar.

He wrote much in this military spirit; but often he was in a different vein. Many another theme, besides military tactics, had occupied that busy brain during different times of his life; and sometimes Piers found him recalling other days, intent upon a problem from "Euclid," and reviving the memory of the interest of these successive stages of laborious study by which he had won his honours as senior Wrangler in England.

Often, again, he found him deep in earnest and difficult thought, as he struggled to solve the enigma of his own chequered life, fraught as it was, spite all its success, with such fatal error and with such mistaken zeal.

This was the thought that most absorbed him, not so much as it regarded himself,—he forgot himself then, as always, when fascinated with an idea; and it was more, as *his* errors in their essence existed and affected the age he lived in, the people he loved, the future he struggled to penetrate,—that these errors interested him as a profound study in themselves.

The conclusions on this subject were, as ever, misty and difficult for many a day; and while *he* gathered in every direction thoughts and fancies for his consolation, amid all this confusion of delusion and mistake, to Piers for long no light rose anywhere; all seemed difficult and mysterious; all seemed failure and folly. His own life, and, alas! still more Victor's, seemed to call for nothing but regretful repentance and hopeless despair.

He often came to Victor burdened with his own thoughts, and weighed down with discouragement,—utterly desperate under the failure of his eager efforts for his friend's salvation, under the shadow of threatening grief.

But he found him again and again so bright, so absorbed, seemingly so oblivious for the time being, that again and again he crushed back his own sufferings, concealed the efforts he was



making, and the failure that ensued, answered Victor's inquiries with a few words of hope and encouragement, and then allowed himself to be drawn into the moment's mood.

He could not shadow that eager spirit deeper than need be with the darkness of his own apprehension and despair.

One evening only it was different.

December had come; and it was one night among quite the latter days, that Piers came to Victor, entering the little room as the darkness was gathering, as the light that fell through the narrow window grew misty and dim.

As he entered, he found his friend had tossed aside his maps and papers, and was sitting in solitary idleness.

Piers started. Victor's aspect was unusual, and filled him with an instant rush of apprehension and surprise.

He scarcely moved as Piers entered; his whole attitude expressed a degree of depression of hope and spirit such as Piers had never surprised him in before.

"Victor," he said twice before his friend looked up.

The light was grey and shadowy in the cell

now, and the gaoler had not yet brought his miserable lamp; but Piers could see clearly enough to realise, when Victor raised his face, that it was paler even than usual, and that his expression was heavy and laden with unwonted feeling. Evidently he had gone through to-day some unusual agitation or paroxysm of grief and despair.

“My dear friend,” Piers said, as he sat down near him, and leaned his arm on the little wooden table. “Victor!” he looked into the other’s face, and waited for him to speak.

Victor could say nothing, and there was still in his countenance that look of trouble and pain.

It overcame Piers; he could not stand it.

He seemed to find here always, in this dismal room, his one encouragement, his brightness, his continuous gleam of hope—the only thing that helped him to go through with it all, to go forth and struggle against failure again.

And if Victor gave way? If Victor had lost courage, if his brave spirit had broken down, then it was over. Piers could hide no longer his own agony of despair.

“Victor! Victor!” he cried, and he covered his face with his hands. “What have we done? What have we done? Good God! what miserable fatal error bewitched us? What a desperate

failure we have made of our wretched lives ! And now—I cannot bear it, Victor—this end—this end for you !”

“For me ?” Victor said, rousing himself at length, as his friend spoke, and uttering the words in a low half-wandering voice—“for me, Piers ? My good old friend, are you mourning for me ?”

“Victor, I cannot look on your face and not mourn. How can I ? how can I ? Good God ! it is dreadful—this imprisonment—the whole thing—and the future.”

“I have been a fool, Piers. Is it my face that has unnerved you to-night ?”

“You have been so bright and brave all this time, Vic., and it helped me. I could bear it in here with you. But to-night ! But I do not wonder—I do not wonder. It is extraordinary how you have borne up till now.”

“And now, Piers ?”

“I do not wonder—I do not wonder,” continued Piers ; and he covered his face again.

At this moment the attendant entered and placed a little lamp on the table between the two, and instantly withdrew. Victor drew his chair in close.

He put his folded arms on the table, and leaned

upon it; and as Piers recovered himself and looked up, the light fell upon his friend's face. Victor's eyes were raised to his now, grave and laden, as when he first entered, with some bitter and very sorrowful thought; but he was perfectly calm, and the pale lines of his countenance were set with an expression much less of self-pity than of judgment severe and stern.

"Piers, are you grieving for *me* to-night?" he said.

"My friend, my friend!"

"And do you think that you find me sad because I realise, and cannot *face*, my doom?"

"Victor, hush, for God's sake!"

"And do you know," he went on interrupting, "you are right so far; I do realise? But in justice, Piers, do not credit me with cowardice. Do not think this is the paleness of terror on my cheek, or that you look on the trace of tears of self-compassion and fear. No, no; listen to me first, and hear who has spent this day with me, and then you will understand what bitter thoughts have been mine. Pasteur Dallon has been with me," he went on, "the old St. Marteau pasteur, whom I used to know so well in days of long ago. He was the Protestant pasteur, and of course my mother's. He was her spiritual counsellor and

her dearest friend; and he came a long way to see me, Piers, for he had left St. Marteau years ago. He has travelled up through all the broken lines and the troubled country from a far corner of France to visit me. He started directly the papers told him of my arrest. And here he has been to-day; and he came with a stern message; he came with a voice and a doctrine that recalled days gone by. He is a Protestant, as I tell you, puritan of the strictest school, and he came as to the son of his old friend, as to a lost child of his flock, as to one plunged in life-long error and darkness, and standing at the gates of death stained with foulest crime. He is a gentle-voiced old man, Piers, stern in spirit, but tender of heart. I have loved him, but he never understood me, and he has mourned over me my whole life long. He and my mother looked on Dax and his followers (worshippers of Reason, as Dax professed himself to be) with horror and repulsion as children of darkness; and my father's fancy for their society gave my mother bitter pain. She dreaded the whole thing for me; and God knows the result showed some reason for her fears. And now, speaking in her words, echoing, as he himself says, her voice that has been hushed so long, Pasteur Dallon came to me to-day, and, as a

Communist, he called me to repent. I made him listen to my tale, and he heard me patiently. He left me in a changed spirit, and rejoiced that he still could bless—my mother's son. He left me asking my pardon, because he had thought it in me to do such deeds; he left me comforted by his visit, for there is something wonderful, Piers, in the touch, at an hour like this, of old familiar hands you have loved in childhood laid in prayer and blessing upon your head. But he left me with the thoughts that paled my cheek as you came in, and brought those tears that still burn in my eyes—tears of regret, tears of sorrow, tears of remorse."

"You meant well; from the very beginning you meant well."

"Yes, that is what I have been saying to myself always; and that is what I have hugged to myself in extenuation of every result. But to-night that old man made me realise it; to-night he has made me feel that—I *deserve* to die."

"You, Victor? impossible!"

"Yes, I shall die," he said firmly; "and I deserve it. I always confessed I did from a military point of view. I did so from the first; but he showed me myself in another light, and made me realise the nature of my sin. Listen,

Piers: he made me feel bitterly the result of actions,—the undying, ever-reviving, ever-reappearing fruits of an evil deed; that it is, as he expressed it, verily a living seed, cast for good or evil upon the ground. He made me feel the dreadful thing I have done; he called me to realise its results on nations, on humanity, on all sides and on all ages to come. It is undying. Alas! we cannot blot its memory from the history of men; it stands—the Paris Commune—an example, a precedent, horrible and revolting indeed, but fraught with bitter possibilities, through all the world's future, in its results. And I—joined it:—I must *die*.”

“And yet you meant so well all your life long, in every thought, in every action. What *have* you done but good? What have you wished but the well-being, the regeneration, of your fellow-men?”

“Ah! that is another point he touched—regeneration—the world's regeneration.”

“Madness, folly, delusion!” Piers exclaimed bitterly. “What has it all come to? Here is the wretched end.”

“Pasteur Dallon spoke of it. He did not understand us Universalists, of course,—he never could; but he said some true things. I believe he is

right. He said vanity, self-confidence, often lead men, even when they want to do a good work, to attempt it wrongly, rashly, and without success; and all because their vanity tells them that *they* have some wonderful new thought, that no one else has thought before—*they* can do deeds no other man can do—*they* can regenerate the world, and then be *the centre of it themselves*. I dare say he is right. Probably there is a good deal more of individual ambition at the bottom of all our theories than we know; and a love of novelty—a rushing after new clothing for old ideas; new ways out of the wilderness of troubles that have begun, and will end, but with the world. ‘Return to the old paths:’ that seemed the summing-up of his teaching; and there may be a good deal of use in it for *you*, Piers,” he added, in his old tone of practical conclusion, as he finished his remarks. “For me—ah!”

“We meant so well,” Piers repeated again.

“We did—we did; and our thought of the old Universal, Auber’s thought, was good and beautiful; and thought is, like action, immortal too. Our dreams, Piers, struggling towards higher things, they cannot die. They seem to do so now, perhaps: they fall into the ground, we think, and perish without result; but, fear not,



they are undying ; from their ruin will spring sometime, for others, a more perfect fruit."

"The whole fabric of life seems dream and delusion sometimes to me," sighed Piers. "Nothing is real on this earth but our errors and follies, and their results."

"It does feel so now and then, when one has to sit still, as I have done, all these months, and contemplate the fatal errors in our own theories and deeds. But you will live to *act* truth—great truths learned from the lessons of our great mistakes."

"I took part with you, Vic. Your thoughts and theories and your mistakes are mine."

"Nay, dear friend ; my lesson is your lesson, and you learn in time what I learn too late. I see it all now. I acknowledge many things I repudiated in days gone by."

"You learn a deeper lesson in the '*vanitas vanitatum*,'" sighed Piers in bitterness of spirit.

"No ; more than that. I realise that no theory, however sublime and however high soaring, is of any value unless founded on fact. The ideal must be the glorification, not the substitute, of reality."

"Ah !"—began Piers sadly.

"Utopian philanthropy," continued Victor, interrupting him, "however high strung, is as

fatal a guide, when applied to national organizations, as the most evil theory could be. I see that now. I remember being so furious once, when Cavour answered, something in these words, to the doctrines of our beloved Mazzini, 'Noble in substance,' he said, 'but not based upon fact.' I thought he accused Mazzini of falsehood; but I know what he meant now. Piers," he continued with sudden change of tone, "*you* will love the people, and you will live for the people, as we always meant to do, even if I am gone; and you will have a helper, you know,—a guide."

"Yes; *she* is further on than we are, Vic. She wishes to *do* just as we wish; and she has found means already to do more than talk."

"Together you will do much. I tried to tell Pasteur Dallon something of our old dreams to-day, and he understood me a little. He says, the great error was thinking we had an universal work to do. He says, and it is true, I see, that no man can put the world to rights, as we used to be so fond of expressing it. He says it is all right where—I hope, I am going; but here we can only *help* a little, with what is altogether wrong. You will do that, and Donna will help you. You will go back to your own position—your right position destined for you, Piers, that,

but for my misleading, you should have occupied from the first."

"Back—to confess the delusions of a lifetime," said Piers, bitterly, again ; "that society was too much for us ; that we are fixed in our positions with chains too strong to be wrenched away ; that the idea of Communism as we meant it, of brotherhood and equality as we saw it taught in the doctrines of Christianity and in the example of Christ, was a delusion, a wild dream that has led us by its fatal beauty, drawn us with its fascination to your destruction and to the ruin of our lives !"

"Society," answered Victor, thoughtfully ; "that is a much-abused word. When we dreamt the old dreams, in our young glowing days, did not society seem to us the name of some gaunt mysterious enemy of humanity, against which we, as philanthropists and reformers in our scheme of the Universal, were to wage war. And now, just in one of those old analogical lessons I used to delight in long ago, it comes to me to see that society is a creation as complete and as immovable as the fixed order of the heavens, and the perfection of all the sequence and degrees in the workings of the earth. Society runs in perfect parallel with every other fixed and established organization of things. Society is a decreed ex-

istence; men who fling themselves against her must perish. We must understand it all better still: we must learn to apply idealism in practice to things as they are. Ah! Piers, that is left for you to do,—practical Englishman: a work fitted for you, perhaps, better than for me—one of a nation whose lot seems to agitate, whose highest achievement is but to dream.”

“But practically in England—?”

“Ah! do not fear for England. That nation has a heart—a great heart, strong, constant, and true—a heart not merely passionate and impulsive, but united to judgment rational and clear. Piers,” he added, conclusively, after a pause, “you have thought all this as well as I, and *you* will act out many of our old thoughts in your life.”

“My life—my life! Victor, how can I care to think of it—while you——”

“Hush, hush! dear friend; do not talk of *me*. How it helps one, Piers, to lift the soul out of one’s miserable little unit of existence, one’s own single individuality of fate, or destiny, to think of all these things largely, as they affect nations, the world, and the age. I like to think of it all in this way; and it is only sad when I turn to France. Ah! Piers, for a heart for France! Wayward, capricious, passionate France! who will

fix her affections? who will captivate and hold her changeful love? When will she learn the beauty of fidelity? When will she believe in the national glory, with which truth, constancy, devotion, in a word, *loyalty* of heart, towers before the eyes of the world and of history, an anchor of safety, and a rock of strength, above all these tossings, turbulent and stormy, which must ever describe the vast surging ocean of a nation's life. Ah! Piers, is that your summons? We have talked much to-night; and now our little hour is over. The time is quickly spent: farewell, my friend, farewell!"

That was the only evening Piers ever found him sad.

Many times he was quite different; and it used to seem to Piers that the sunniest bit of life he knew in these days was to be found in that narrow cell.

But the evenings grew fewer and fewer now.

December came. Again his name was brought up; again pleading, protest, and intercession were unavailing; again his condemnation was pronounced—and this was final. Hope was gone.

All this time Gaie had written but one unchanging wish—to come to him.

But in these early days after the Commune,

Sir John felt truly that Paris was no fit place, even under these peculiar circumstances, to which to bring his two girls.

Besides, it was of no use, Piers wrote to them. They would not have been admitted to Victor's cell, even if any one could have wished them to witness the scenes that surrounded that prison.

Even Victor himself begged they might not come to Paris—at least not at first. He knew the state of Paris; he knew the scenes it presented; knew the shocks of horror any heart must receive. He wished them away from Paris—as far as possible away; that was his desire, through the months of his confinement.

But, as the end drew near, as it became evident that hope was in vain, and that effort in his behalf was futile, a change came over him, and the longing became strong that he might see her—just see her once again.

The days were nearly spent now that required all the force of his endurance; and the hour was drawing close upon him when her coming would be too late.

He told this wish to Piers one evening, as they sat together, and as the moment approached when the gaoler's voice would disturb them with its order to go.

"I feel I *may* see her," he had said, as he told Piers his wish. "For a long time I feared I ought not to do so: I thought I was unfit. But now since Pasteur Dalon has been here, and has pardoned me and blessed me, laying his hand upon my head, I feel I *may* see her. I may let her come to me, my own, my fair angel of the picture. I am a condemned rebel; but my hands have no stain of blood. I may let her come. Just once: she would wish to come."

"I know she wishes it."

"Then I will write, and change my usual words to her; I will say, Come."

"And she will come."

"I know it: she has promised. You remember the picture—the 'Mors Januæ Vitæ'? The day we stood together before it, she said that when I wanted my life-angel she would come. You remember the picture, Piers?"

"Of course I do."

"I try to realise its truth; and I know she does, even stronger than I. So will *you* write, then, Piers, and say something to Sir John to help me, that he may let her come?"

"It is but a few hours to London," Piers answered. "I will fetch them myself. I know my uncle will bring them: I know he will let them

come. Do not fear, Victor ; by to-morrow night they will be in Paris."

"Thanks, thanks, my friend. Ah ! I should like dearly to see her. And, Piers, it will not do to delay ; it may be any morning now."

"I will go to-night," Piers answered. "There is still time to catch the mail. Vic., do not be discouraged : keep up heart. I will not lose a moment. Before I come to you again, they will be in Paris. I will go up to-night."

And Piers went.



## CHAPTER XXII.

“ Oh! what was love made for, if 'tis not the same  
Through joy and through torment, through glory and shame?  
I know not, I ask not, if guilt's in that heart:  
I but know that I love thee, whatever thou art.  
Thou hast called me thy angel in moments of bliss;  
And thine angel I'll be through the horrors of this.”

THOMAS MOORE.

“ LET me go to him; let me go to him!”

Such had been for many months Gaie's constant cry.

“ My darling, it is not fit for you to go there,” was always Sir John's reply. “ See, he does not wish it himself.”

And he turned away to hide his emotion; for his eyes could not bear to rest on his little sunny daughter, crushed as she was by bitter sorrow.

If he could have foreseen all this, he murmured often to himself, truly Lady Curzon Kellam would have had more of her way.

It was a terrible cloud of calamity that had rolled over their bright home—terrible and heart-

rending. Gaie bent under it, like a flower in storm.

It was almost happiness when Piers at last arrived to fetch them. They were to go. She was to see him ; and she shut her eyes to what lay beyond. It was almost happiness : they were all to go.

Strange, melancholy journey ; sad unspeakably to Piers and Donna, as they sat in the sympathy of silence side by side ; almost sweet to Gaie, in the midst of all its pain, as she thought hour by hour brought them nearer to where they had imprisoned her love—to where she would see him again.

They reached Paris late in the evening, and Piers saw Victor that night.

He was rejoiced they had come, he said. That very morning he had thought his turn had come at last ; and he knew not by what chance others were taken in his stead.

It was a matter of a few days more, they all knew ; still the Council delayed the last order, and still the country and the press rang with protestations against his doom.

But it was decreed to be. To be—to be, and yet delayed ; and dreary days passed, while permission was sought for his friends' admittance to his cell.

Terrible, weary days! while they waited for that permission to see him, and had to pass each night in uncertainty if on the morrow the admission might avail. Days of darkness, nights of horror—a time of terrible experience, such as leaves its stamp indelible on human lives.

Morning after morning Piers hurried with the dawn of light to that prison; eager was his first question, painful the intensity of his suspense, as he conned over the name-list of the day, which he bribed the officials somehow to show to him. Painful the gasp of relief that broke from him, morning after morning, as he saw that name was absent—Victor not yet among the doomed.

The sisters had been many days in Paris, when at length the permission reached them.

It was late one evening. The dark December day had long closed in, when an official came from Versailles to Sir John Graeme, bearing an answer, at length, to his repeated appeal.

“The *condamné*, Victor Lescar, *numero* 1773, might see his friends from England to-night.”

Sir John saw him, and wept as a man would weep over a gallant son, as he met the clear blue eyes, and looked into the delicate face, pale and worn indeed, but yet calm, brave, and re-

signed—as he felt the eager hand, thin and nervous, lying in his, and heard Victor's voice asking pardon for the sorrow he had brought on his home.

“Forgive me Gaie's tears,” he had said.

“My boy, my poor boy!” had been Sir John's only answer, as his own tears fell fast over his rugged cheek.

“There is no hope,” Victor had said calmly.

“None, none, my dear boy. Farewell!”

“I deserve to die; as a soldier, my death is just,” he had continued.

Yes, perhaps, as the voice of the world was saying at that moment; and yet—could he not be spared for France?

“They will not let me see you again,” he had continued to Sir John.

“I fear not, my boy. Farewell, farewell!”

It was near midnight when they had arrived in answer to that message of permission, and it was very late when the door opened again, which had closed behind Sir John,—and Victor, who sat struggling to recover his composure after that long farewell, turned to see the figure slight and small he knew so well, to see the veil thrown back that hung over her fair face, and to realise

that for one more moment of life he saw Gaie again.

She came in so quietly ; she looked up at him with a sweet, strange smile. The scene was so unfamiliar to her—the small, dark room, the flickering light, the agile form that sprang up as she entered, the pale wan face, the bright recognition in his eyes—she saw it all.

She stood silent, she looked up, she answered his bright smile ; then he sprang forward, and she was folded close in his arms.

“ You have come, Gaie ! ”

“ Victor ! ”

The door was closed then, as those who stood behind her drew back. They saw the recognition ; they heard the exclamation, glad, full of mingled pain and joy ; and then they drew back and shut the door on that meeting, on those short moments of struggling anguish and love ; none, not the most dear, felt they should intrude a moment longer to look on that meeting or to witness that farewell—to hear the tones of their broken voices as they struggled to give each other courage, as they strove to pluck up the very roots of their love from the soil of time and earth and to cast them anew in eternity and in the heavens.

It was but a little while they were allowed for their parting.

But it was done; she had come to him as she promised, his angel of the picture—come, now the strife was over, now the end seemed near; and she brought him, with strong fortitude, her bright, sweet courage to help his shrinking soul.

One hour, and the door opened again. One bitter, bitter struggle—one last sweet word—one moment he held her close as they all stood there. And then—he scarce knew what he did, as the gaoler's voice was heard—rough, kindly, but monotonous and determined—as Sir John came forward, as Donna and Piers stood somewhere behind, and as he realised that the form he laid gently in Sir John's arms was quite unconscious. She had fainted away utterly from all pain or life for the moment, and could not return the agonized pressure of his last kiss as he murmured once more—farewell.

They bore her away; the rough, monotonous voice spoke again. It meant not unkindly; but these scenes were passing in every cell around him just then; they must be all got through, there was but a little time for each. “*En avant!* The hour is up!”

They bore her out. Victor could see Piers bend to help Sir John to carry her; he could catch a soft gleam on Donna's sad, tear-stained face; then the door closed on them and he was alone.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

“ Oh ! man may bear with suffering ; his heart  
Is a strong thing, and godlike in the grasp  
Of pain, that wrings mortality ; but tear  
One chord affection clings to, part one tie  
That binds him to woman’s tender love,  
And his great spirit yieldeth like a reed.”

NATHANIEL P. WILLIS, *Hagar*.

QUITE, quite alone, and it was far into the morning ; his little lamp burnt low.

He turned, and for one moment, for the first time during all these months of his captivity, he glared round the narrow limits of his wretched cell, and a fierce throb rose within him of rebellion against his bitter, his inevitable fate.

A cry, unuttered, seemed to struggle with the anguish in his soul. She was gone from him ! Torn from him ; shut out from his sight ; gone from him for ever ; and he ?—was caged like a beast of the desert here ! He would be led forth, only to die.

He threw his arms up, and a wild delirium



seemed to torture him for a moment. He buried his hands in his thick yellow hair; he looked frantically round from side to side of those dull stone walls, so obdurate and unyielding; and he rushed for an instant with frantic, passionate gestures from side to side. No good! No avail! No escape! Inevitable!

“Gaie! Gaie!” burst from his lips.

He stood still a moment; the light flickered, it sank into darkness; then—he staggered forward, and with the passionate movement of a weary and baffled child, he flung himself at length upon his pallet, and burst into floods of bitter tears.

It was the first time he had broken down through all these months of suffering, and he had feared it would be so. She would unnerve him; her tears would take the manhood from him. The sight of her would fill his heart with strong yearnings for life. And so it was.

Gaie! Gaie! He loved her—he would live to love Gaie! He had been strong, full of sweet courage to give her while she had sat there; but now he was desolate—she was gone.

A great horror seized him—a darkness rolled over his spirit, in its solitude, in its despair. How young he was! How full of power and

vigour and capacity and love of life; and he must die!

He did not fear death—he had braved it many and many a time, through these past months, since he had left her. Braved it, knowing that each instant might bring it on swift wings.

But now—now—love of life had seized him—love of Gaie, love of action, love of France. Oh! to live, to redeem the lost glories of the Eagle! Oh! to live, to win triumph when he met nothing but despair! Oh! to live, to live!—and he must die!

He was broken down, and he lay weeping with fierce violence. He was overwhelmed at last—he lay shrinking from the horror of his doom.

It was a terrible storm that broke over him; the bitterest hour of all his life was passed in that struggle then. He had lost courage and lost submission. The lustre of all heavenly hope was hidden for these moments in dense gloom. He lay, and the sobs shook his frame as with a child-like passion and anguish.

He lay and wept, he knew not how long; he seemed conscious of nothing but his bitterness of heart, his utter despairing pain, until, at length,—gradually, slowly, there came over his spirit, worn as it was, enfeebled with imprisonment, that

sense of exhaustion, of utter fatigue, that comes often with strange soothing influence after such a storm.

And as he lay, his face buried in his hands, his eyes hidden from the darkness, there came to him gradually sweet memories chasing his despair. Old, old memories—first of long ago, of sunny gardens in the Grand St. Marteau, of water trickling from the fountain in the summer evenings in the squares—memories in which soothing music seemed to mingle with mystic power. “Thinking music” was an old expression of his, by which he had often described the influence of harmonic rhythm that flowed sometimes over his soul.

He lay “thinking music” now, almost unconscious at length from intense exhaustion from the weight of sorrow which had crushed him down.

He lay “thinking music” until there came slowly to him the memory of one night in the happy past, when they had gone, he and Piers with Donna and Gaie, to hear the *Elijah* in the midst of their London wanderings, and he seemed to see again as he lay there the bright sweet face that had looked upwards to his; he seemed to meet the light in her shadowy eyes as the music streamed in grand chorus or soft melody above

them, and as he (quite familiar with every part) translated the meaning for her of each changing bar.

It came so clearly back to him—the music, the words, the meaning they had for him then; and they streamed sweetly over his spirit—the mighty rushing of the wind, the strong echoes of the storm, the fire and the earthquake, the thought of rending rocks and of hearts that quailed with fear, and through all, above all, the sweet memory of the low mystic message, the whispering of the “still small voice” in which—bearing treasures of pity and heavenly tenderness, giving strong courage, soothing, and breathing resignation and hope—at last, in the oratorio, “Onward, onward, came the Lord.”

It dropped into mystic, dreamy reverie, the memory of these echoing words—they mingled with his vision, they whispered in the sweet voice he loved, they caressed his spirit, soothed his anguish and his rebellious pain. He slept.

The morning broke in upon him, lying on that wretched pallet, the grey streaks fell across his fair, wavy hair, across his face, wasted and pallid, on the sweet calm expression of the parted lips, as, with his head thrown back wearily on his arm, he lay there and—slept. He slept as Argyle slept,

as many have slept on the eve of a violent death, many whose hearts were as pure as his, whose souls were as noble and resigned; slept the sleep which He giveth, the Great Comforter of men, the sleep He denied only to Himself—the sleep with which he seems to soothe for His children that hour of bitterness beneath which He quailed; the hour of the horror of anticipation, the hour of the fainting heart, of the struggling submission, of the agonized cry, “If it be possible—spare.”

*He* lived, and slept not through these hours of anguish,—the Great Saviour of Humanity; He endured the bitter struggle, He shed the drops of agony and spirit-pain.

Surely it is in deepest sympathy and tenderest recollection, that, in this bitter hour, it has been found so often that—“He giveth His beloved sleep.”

## CHAPTER XXIV.

“And there she lay as innocent and mild  
As unfledged dove or daisy born in dew ;  
Fair dreams descending chased off visions wild,  
She stretched her hand and on the shadows smiled.”

ALLAN CUNNINGHAM.

“Hope on, hope ever ! yet the time shall come  
When man to man shall be a friend and brother,  
And this old earth shall be a blessed home,  
And all Earth's family love one another.  
Hope on, hope ever ! ”

GERALD MASSEY.

THE grey dawn of the cold winter morning was breaking in the far East, and the two sisters sat still, as they had been sitting through the night, keeping a weary, anxious watch—watching because they could not rest.

When they had brought Gaie home, scarce revived from the long faint in which she had sank as Victor held her in the agony of his last farewell, she had sat down in an arm-chair by the closed window, and Donna had knelt on the floor by her side.

Sir John had followed them into the room, and had bent anxiously over her ; but she had begged him, with a faint, struggling smile, to leave her alone with Donna. Donna had told him she thought it best, so he had left them ; and through the long hours from midnight till the break of day the two had stayed there, Gaie leaning back in the large chair, her eyelids heavy, her cheeks deadly pale, her eyes resting with an absent, weary gaze upon Donna's face.

Donna had wound her arms round her, and she gazed with intense eagerness, with an agony of grief and anxiety, on the sweet face so quivering and pale, and she felt as she knelt there as though her heart would break in her pain for Gaie, in her sorrow for the brave young brother, promised, but never to be hers in her anguish of grief over the intense sadness of the whole miserable tale.

Gaie, Gaie, their bright beautiful darling ! She would gladly have given her life to have spared her this pain.

She gazed with anxiety the greater because it seemed to her through the hours of that night as if Gaie were scarce conscious yet, as if she never rallied fully from that long swoon, as if she talked and looked at her like one in a dream, in

a misty state of half-realisation. Her eyes were so heavy, her cheek so white, her manner so composed, her voice touching with its ring of inexpressible sadness, and yet—so calm.

For many hours she refused to lie down to rest; but she sat there repeating again and again to Donna the last few words that Victor had said, repeating his expression of undying hope, his confidence in a future eternal, his strength to die.

“He said, Donna, it is right—he must die. Justice, military justice, requires it; but, oh! it is sad—it is very sad!”

“Terribly sad, darling! God give us all strength to bear His will. God help you, my own love!”

“He says he has pursued a phantom his whole life long—his society, you know—his idea about universal love and brotherhood. A beautiful phantom—was it not, Donna? And now he is dying for his dream, because he thought he would find it realised when power came to them in Paris. And he thought he would save France—and, oh! he was so deceived. He was in error, Donna; he did wrong, he says it was wrong, and it is for his mistake—he must die.”

“Surely, surely,” thought Donna painfully, as



she looked into the heavy dreamy eyes, "she scarcely realised the words she said."

Die! It seemed horrible to Donna that that bright young being must die. Die a death of violence! Die, hurried to an early and dishonoured grave! Die with rebels and murderers! Die by the hand of France! It seemed terrible to Donna; and Gaie could be so dreamy, so resigned, and calm.

"You know," she went on, "he thinks now that while they all theorised for earth, they really dreamt of heaven; he thinks old Père Dax, in his dreams of universal peace and loving brotherhood, spoke just the form in which *religion* came to him, and that the old man's dream was a vision of heaven, not a possible idea for earth. He believes—Victor does—in the New Jerusalem, and quite bright and clear it seems to him. He sees that his work, the work for which life has trained him, need not be done here. He seems to see into the other life, and to be as full of hope and prospect for it as he once was for this life of earth. He thinks Dax's dream, for which they have all lived and died, was an inspiration. He thinks numbers of great people have dreamt it as well as his old Auber; and he says that, though harm has sprung out of all the errors of

their theories, just at this time in Paris, where they all made such terrible mistakes, that it is not an evil dream, and not a lost dream, but that it has fallen like seed on the ground, to spring up for many harvests and be resown again. He says, Donna, that long after this, when people have understood, and when nations have agreed that there shall be war no more, and that all people on this earth are of one hope, and one life-blood, and when gradually and gradually men have done each for his brother—the rich for the poor, the poor for the rich—all that should be, and people are suffering and starving and wretched and struggling no more, then, he says, their dream will be realised ; and he thinks it *will* be some day. Then men will look back, Donna, and know what the Cause really was, and what the effort, for which *he* dies. He erred, he says—he tried all wrongly ; but the Cause is true, and everlasting, and good. Some day it will be realised, and then people will know that it began with Père Dax and him. He told me all that, Donna, and that—he is not afraid to die.”

“My darling, he may still be spared ; still—still—they may let him live.”

“He does not think so,” said Gaie.”

And so she went on through all these hours—

strangely calm, speaking in that tone of dreamy sadness, touching in the extreme. She talked, and Donna could not quiet her; she could only listen, and soothe, and cling round her with tender arms, and look with sad eagerness into her face.

“My darling, my darling!” was often all she could say.

The dawn was breaking in a grey line in the far-away sky, when Donna rose at length, and, hoping to rouse Gaie and induce her to move to her bed, she threw back the thick French curtains that hung over the windows, and opened the shutters that shut out the gleams of day.

This window looked towards Versailles. The innumerable towers and chimneys of the town, the outline of the leafless trees in the gardens, appeared dim and dusky in the struggling light. The shadow of night seemed rolling back in heavy sombre clouds from the horizon. The morning was breaking, chill, wintry, and grey.

Gaie looked out as she sat up in her chair, her fair hair falling tangled over her shoulders, her blue eyes dull and strangely dilated, her cheek pale as her white dress.

She put up her hands and pushed back her hair with a weary movement; her eyes wandered out towards the dawning light—they were dry,

tearless eyes, with a look in them of pain and half-conscious sorrow too keen for tears—and as Donna opened the shutters she gazed for a few minutes dreamily and in silence.

Her mind was still full of Victor's words—full of the sense of his presence, strengthened with his courage, calm with the calmness he had assumed to inspire her. She looked a few minutes out into the morning light. It was cold, dreary, and chilly.

Suddenly she called, "Donna!" uttering the name with a quick, gasping sob.

"Donna!"

Her sister turned and came quickly to her; her face had sunk covered by her hands.

"Oh, Donna!" she cried again, and a shiver ran through her frame. "Oh, Victor, Victor, Victor! I cannot bear it! Oh, come to me!—my strength is going—I cannot—I cannot! Speak to me again! Oh, comfort me!—oh, help me! No, no, they will not—they cannot! Victor, Victor!—my love, my love!"

She was trembling with a terrible hysterical violence. Donna threw her arms round her again, and Gaie clung to her close, but she trembled and sobbed bitterly still.

"Donna, I am afraid!" she cried. "No, no—

will they, Donna? They must not—they must not! Oh, Victor!—I forget; I cannot remember what he said. Tell it to me; say it all again to me. Victor, Victor! Oh, Donna, I am afraid!”

She clung to her sister. Each instant she trembled more violently; each moment the sobs came stronger and more swift.

“Gaie, Gaie! God help you, my darling!”

“I am afraid, I am afraid!” she cried; “and, oh! what will be—Donna, it is morning—morning again. When will Piers come—when shall we know?”

“Piers said he would come early—very, very early—my own love. Try to lie down, Gaie; try to be calm again.”

“I cannot, I cannot. Oh! what is it?—I am so frightened, so frightened! Donna, Donna, hold me close! It is morning—oh, that it would still be night!”

“My darling!”

“Why am I so frightened, Donna? What is it? He said to have courage—he gave me courage when he spoke—but it is gone. Oh, Donna, Donna!”

“My Gaie, what can I do for you? Try, think again all he said; try to have faith and hope. Gaie, we may still have hope.”

“No, no, no hope ; only fear. It is like thunder, Donna—what is it? Something dreadful, fearful, coming over me! What is it? Oh, I am so afraid!”

She clung closer and closer to Donna; she buried her face in her sister's shoulder; she shivered from head to foot; her teeth chattered together in her sudden frenzy of indefinite fear.

“Oh! why has it come?” she cried again. “Oh! why am I so afraid? Oh, Victor, Victor! what is it? Donna, hold me close! Donna, Donna, what is it?”

“My darling!”

“It is like thunder—terribly, terribly close—rolling near us. I am afraid!”

She shook with sudden spasms of terror; she clung and sobbed, and her voice came in broken accents of passionate agony and fear.

“Let me lay you down, darling—Gaie, my own sister, my love!”

“Yes, let me; I will lie down,” she said; “but do not leave me, Donna—stay by me, let me feel you here. Oh, Victor! they cannot—they cannot! How weak I am, Donna; I thought I could be strong like him.”

“Lie down, dearest,” repeated Donna; and

she drew her gently across the room, and laid her, like a weary, frightened child, in her bed.

The fair head, covered with its long, wavy hair, dropped upon the pillow, and—as it touched its resting-place the violence of the nervous tremor seemed to cease ; the eyes closed heavily, and the arms dropped from round Donna's neck, and she sank back upon the bed, with a gesture of exhaustion and despair.

“ Try and keep quiet ; I will close the curtain again,” Donna said, when she had watched a moment and seen that the fit of hysterical terror was passing away.

“ Do,” Gaie murmured, “ do, Donna, do. I am not so frightened now.”

Donna walked to the window.

It was quite daylight—it was about seven o'clock ; and as she approached, and Gaie lay still and more composed, she could not help pausing to look out upon the grey winter morning, to strive to steady her own thoughts, and to gather herself together to realise what the chill of terror that had fallen over Gaie, as the day broke, could mean. It had communicated its influence with such chilling sadness to herself, that she shivered too as she looked out upon the grey dawn.

Morning—the break of morning—what dire

possibilities might it not contain? What scenes the dawn of these winter mornings saw day after day in Paris! What might not any morning—nay, this morning—bring of horror and heart-breaking grief to them! What mysterious terror was this that had fallen upon Gaie as the morning dawned? Had some mystic messenger whispered to her spirit something in revelation of what this dawn might bring? What spring of sympathy had been touched afresh in the mystic current that linked Gaie's soul to the heart she loved?

What could it mean? Donna trembled, too, as she looked out at the grey morning, and felt indeed what it *might* bring.

Gaie called her again presently, and she turned and approached.

Her sister lay quiet now. She lay—her eyes closed, the wet lashes lying upon her cheek, the deadly palor had left her face, a faint flush of colour tinged her cheek. Her lips were parted, and an expression rested upon them, altered again with strange rapidity from the look of horror and anguish, that had been there a few minutes before.

They were both silent for a moment, while Donna watched; till suddenly, in the stillness of the dawn, a faint sound reached them—the



soft twittering at their window of two wakening birds.

“Yes, that is it,” Gaie whispered, “that is it; it *has* come. But I forgot them—Donna, tell me—the words, I mean. You remember the words, long ago—the thunder—the birds—and lying still, so still.”

The painful, terrified expression passed more and more completely away as she lay there, and a sweet, peaceful smile curled her quivering lip as Donna’s voice murmured in the quiet of the breaking day the old sweet words which Gaie had remembered in her agony, and called for—to soothe her fears:—

“Under the shroud .  
Of his thunder-cloud,  
Lie ye still, when His voice is loud,  
And you *will* feel  
His love-notes steal,  
Like the bird’s song  
After the thunder-peal.”

“For His banner over us is—Love.”

## CHAPTER XXV.

“ Under the walls of Monterey,  
At daybreak the bugles began to play—  
Victor Galbraith!  
In the midst of the morning damp and grey,  
These were the words they seemed to say—  
Come forth to thy death,  
Victor Galbraith!  
Forth he came with a martial tread,  
Firm was his step, erect his head—  
Victor Galbraith!  
He who so well the bugle played,  
Could not mistake the words it said—  
Come forth to thy death,  
Victor Galbraith!”

LONGFELLOW.

THE watch of that night was kept by yet another.

Piers had tossed sleepless from side to side through every one of these hours that intervened between the time when they returned from the prison after Gaie's parting with Victor, and the breaking of the morning light over the towers and chimneys of Paris—over Versailles and Satory—some miles away.

He had lain tossing, sleepless, and tortured with numerous forebodings—torn, much as Gaie had been, with a frenzy of despair.

He had not been able to obtain any satisfactory assurance from the governor of the prison at Versailles the night before.

The evening papers had contained the announcement that the Commission of Pardon had commuted the sentence of Haubert, and still rejected the appeal of Luller, Rosseau, and Lescar. This contained no intimation of dates or probabilities, to the initiated or to the world at large; but it pushed hope a stage further distant, and it filled Piers with ominous terror of what the morning might bring.

As the first streak of dawn flickered in the east, he rose from his bed, and dressed hurriedly. The passionate anxiety of his heart impelled him to hurry even thus early to the precincts of Satory.

The series of terrible deeds that had been achieved lately at Satory were all done at the break of dawn; each morning brought a thrill of terror and of awful possibilities to every cell of the condemned.

He dressed, and hurried out.

It was still dark, and where his road lay, by

the river, as he turned out of the Champs Elysées, the lamps glistened still amid the thick, leafless branches of the trees.

He passed along by the Avenue Rapp, walking rapidly towards the Point du Jour, that gate which saw the hardest fighting of the two sieges, and through which the Versailles troops eventually forced their way into the city of the Commune.

He passed many a house where traces were still apparent of the fighting that had been, the shattered walls and the horrid blackened gaps looking especially dreary and grim in the vague, misty light.

He hurried along, something impelling him, some fresh instinctive sense of terror and foreboding thrilling him this morning—a stronger anxiety than usual driving him to make that early inquiry, earlier than usual, at the prison gate.

As he passed by the Maison de Justice he met a file of sergents de ville, and as he looked up suddenly—for he had been hurrying along with his eyes fixed moodily upon the ground—he looked and saw that all along the broad Avenue de Paris, and trooping up from the side streets, were soldiers already at this early hour—a battery

of artillery, a company of Chasseurs, some troops of carbineers and other cavalry. Far down the road filing out of sight—all tending in one direction, all tending one way.

He watched them: they looked strange in the dusky, breaking light; they were filing across the roughly-mended bridge of the Sèvres, they were winding under the hill of the famous Crown Prince's battery, from which so much execution had been done on devoted Paris in those days gone by.

He knew where they were going. They would file along till they had climbed that road above the Ecole Communal, a road every stone of which could tell its tale of death and pain. They would pass through Viroflay, that picturesque village he had known in happier days, a bright, favourite sunny resort of the gay Parisians. He remembered a May morning when he had walked there to breakfast with Victor, and seen the rosy dawn of the summer gilding the May blossoms with a sweet warm hue. Now the grey mists of December lay heavy on Viroflay, and these dismal troops would file through its rows of pretty villas and its gardens he remembered gay with rich foliage and flowers.

He knew where they were going, and he

watched them a moment with a throbbing heart; they would ride on, on till they had climbed the steep heights of the hillside, and till they stood in the grey dawn on the tableland of Satory.

He had seen on many mornings these companies trooping silently along. He watched them now for a few moments, and just then he saw what he was seeking—an empty coupé. He sprang into it, and, at his hasty order, the man turned his horse's head and drove swiftly towards Versailles. They reached the precincts of the Communists' prisons, and Piers sprang quickly to the ground.

Soldiers were crowding here; at the far end of the straight road, stretching from the gate of the enclosure towards the fatal plain, stood some ambulance waggons, past which he hurried, shuddering.

The gate of the prison was surrounded by sergents de ville in the smart new uniform of the Republic, and soldiers with uniforms worn and tarnished, bearing signs of service in the months gone by. The light was fast growing, the clouds were rolling back from the winter sky, there was a chilly mist hanging low in the atmosphere. The men who stood round him shivered with the cold, stamped their feet as they waited impatiently,

and shrugged their shoulders in disgust at the discomfort of the gloomy scene.

Piers could not get near the prison door; he had to wait on the fringe of the square of soldiers; he had to wait with the crowd of people who gathered fast now, even at this early hour.

He had to stand, with heart throbbing with pain that almost suffocated him with its intensity, with eyes fixed on those closed and barred doors.

He waited—they all waited; the daylight grew, a chill wind swept round them, and the Frenchmen still stamped their feet and exclaimed with impatience at the delay.

*“Soyez tranquille,”* some one said philosophically; *“soyez tranquille, mon cher, ça sera l’heure militaire.”*

And so it was.

The tones of a distant clock were wafted suddenly to them, striking slowly, with stern solemnity, the morning hour. From the outskirts of the battalions of troops the roll of the drum resounded beating the signal *“aux champs.”*

Far over the distance of the fatal Satory plains came the clang of the signal trumpet responding and announcing the hour, and instantly, simultaneously, the doors of the prison swung heavily open.

The troops dressed and closed in, a thrill shot through the crowd of spectators, a murmur of excitement and half horror burst from them, as, close surrounded by gens d'armes, sergents de ville and soldiers of the Garde and of the line, there emerged the three condemned of to-day.

On one side Kerré, that grim cruel-visaged man, whose sanguinary deeds filled the world with horror, whose order, "*Faites flamber Finance*," consigned Paris to the flames. On the other side Luller, once colonel in the Communist army, a man whose short-lived authority had been applied to the murder of those very priests who had tended the wounded, French, Prussians, Republicans, and Communists alike. The man whose hand had shot down fathers and sons, women and children, in the horrid tyranny of the *travaux forcés* on the Communist barricades.

For such men there lives no pity—there rises no protest from the most sensitive heart.

But for him who walked between them? Erect, undaunted, his eyes grave but full of courage, his uncovered head held up firmly, walked Victor Lescar.

His hour had come. This morning was the morning of his doom; this daybreak was to be his last. Walking between a murderer and an



infamous *incendiaire*—strange contrast in mien and in expression as he was in character and heart.

He walked, steady, brave, and firm—the pure-hearted Idealist of Universal Peace—he walked forth to perish with the murderers of Frenchmen, and at the hands of his beloved France! Surely they must have felt, those judges who condemned him, that France *must* have a Curtius flung into the gulf of her ruin, into the abyss to which *she* had been dragged, dishonoured—the result of the frivolous luxury of her past!

Forth he came, pure-hearted, bright young soldier.

He came forth. The agony of the night of shrinking despair had passed from him, though the shadow had fallen deep and darkly now; his chivalrous nature was re-strung with courage, his young spirit no longer quailed.

He walked firmly, his head erect, his eyes calm and clear.

He looked round on the mass of soldiers, and past them to the gathering crowd, and then—not till then—his step faltered for an instant, his cheek grew a shade more pale, his eyes glistened with a new light, a gleam shot from them of

regret and pain. They had lit among that surging crowd upon the dark countenance of his friend.

Their gaze met—a cry broke from Piers. He struggled through the gathering multitude, he reached the fringe of the soldiers, he pushed through them with eager force, he pressed forward through their ranks, till he nearly reached the inner circle where now the prisoners stood.

“Victor, my friend ! my brother !” he cried, in loud tones of agony and despair. “Victor !”

He struggled wildly with the rough hands laid upon him ; he shook them off ; he struck them down as he strove to wrench himself from their grasp, and to rush towards his friend.

Quite in vain. A dozen hands were laid on him ; the muzzles of a dozen rifles were held close to his ear. In vain he struggled. He called again, “Victor, Victor !” maddened with the agony of despair.

But he could not reach him—he could not touch him ; only the pitying sympathetic glance of the eager eyes met his, as Victor turned sadly to see him, struggling with that hopeless force. He put up his hand, deprecating Piers’s efforts ; his lips moved, but the words could not reach his friend.

“Do not!” he seemed trying to urge by sign and speech—“do not! Go, my friend; it is hopeless—useless. I am resigned; be you also submissive. It is in vain.”

It seemed but one horrible moment of anguish to Piers, as he struggled vainly, as his voice rang in passionate protest, as he stretched his hand towards his friend.

But one moment. He was seized by a force strong and irresistible; he was dragged back, and held forcibly, while the ranks closed in and the order was given to move.

They surrounded the prisoners, and pressed near them, as the mob became excited; they moved on slowly in a dense, massive block of men.

A moment longer, and the *condamnés* were hidden. But once more Piers caught the glance of those bright kind eyes; but once he could see the hand raised in sign of farewell, and then the soldiers moved on.

They passed him slowly; they filed out of the prison-yard; they turned towards Satory, and they were gone.

The crowd followed eagerly close upon their heels, and the men who held Piers in their grasp flung him roughly from them to the ground,

shouldered their muskets, and ran onwards to their post; soldiers and people in a dense mass, they moved on.

Piers fell upon a heap of stones—the *débris* of the ruin of a fallen house, and in the agony of his despair and sorrow he lay there, his face covered with his hands, all the grief and bitterness of their parting flooding over his spirit in one moment like the rushing of a mighty wave.

The horror and agony of his soul overpowered him. The terrible realisation had come, of the waste and ruin of that young life: it had come. He lay there crushed with his despair. He hid his face from the daylight; he covered his eyes from the vision of that company retreating down the road. He lay still—motionless.

He had lain, how long he knew not—an hour it *might* have been, a few minutes it really *was* (while the sound of the tramp of that retreating squadron sank slowly into the distance),—when—suddenly—there came along the road another sound—the loud clatter of a horse's hoof.

A mounted cuirassier dashed along at furious speed; his horse, *ventre à terre*, came clattering over the hard causeway: he galloped up the

avenue; he swung round the corner, he reached the gateway of the prison; and then only Piers became conscious of his approach.

The trooper was swearing loud and angrily: the horse had shied at Piers's prostrate figure, had stopped suddenly in his rapid stride, and was plunging violently on the road beside him.

Piers sat up; he looked confusedly round.

How long had he lain there? Only a few minutes—yes, that was all; for,—far down the route towards Satory plain, where the Ambulance stood,—there still filed that sombre mass of soldiers,—tramping through the misty light under the low-hanging sky.

The trooper plunged his spurs into his horse's side; he swore again at Piers, as he struggled with his rattling bridle; and then he conquered, and again he dashed furiously on.

Down the route towards Satory he went, close on the track of that retreating mass, galloping rapidly over the ground; and Piers, with a strange fascination, watched him.

Dark against the heavy mists of the morning sky the mass of soldiers moved on; swift towards them sped the mounted cuirassier, the clash of his arms and the sharp ring of his

horse's hoofs echoing loud and clear in the morning air.

And Piers watched the moving crowd, the dark lowering sky, the horse and man dashing over the long straight road.

A moment—he has caught them, and he halts ; a moment more, and the dark massive squadron, moving so steadily, suddenly halts as well.

What is this ?

Far away, beyond the towers of Versailles and the brown wintry trees of the gardens, the sun is rising and struggling to burst through the gloomy mist of the wintry dawn.

It breaks over the black cloud that has hung all this time low in the horizon ; it sheds a ray of silvery radiance down the long dreary road ; it lights on that mass of halting soldiers ; it tips their shakos and the trappings of their uniform, till they glisten in the sudden lustre of the morning ray.

There is a curious movement among them ; the dense human wall seems to break for one moment—they separate ; and Piers can distinguish a large division and a small.

On moved again the larger mass, away beyond that sun-ray, into the distant and misty gloom ; and the little company that is left behind them

stands immovable, the golden light still tipping the soldiers' heads.

Piers gazed and gazed still, shading his eyes from the sudden burst of light; he gazed along the straight road, watching the dark mass that is again retreating,—scanning the little company that stands in the hope and glory of the day.

Clatter now come the horse's hoofs again. The trooper is returning, but slowly, trotting leisurely and carelessly along, his rein loosed, his whole attitude relaxed: his duty was done.

A strange excitement, as the soldier drew near to him, seized upon Piers.

He sprang up; he stood straight in the horseman's way; he laid a firm hand upon the hanging rein.

“Bien?” growled the cuirassier angrily; but instantly, with characteristic bonhomie, he altered his mien. He stopped his horse, glad to light his pipe in this chilly morning, glad to let his steed cool his hot sides while he exchanged a moment's gossip with this unknown friend.

“Grand Dieu!” exclaimed Piers, breathless with agitation. What took you there—there?” he cried, pointing down the road towards the soldiers.

“ *Tiens ! que voulez-vous ?* ” growled the horse-man with a sardonic grin. “ *Que fais-je, moi, dans cette galère—eh ?* I went with an errand, *mon bon* ; and an errand that did not brook delay. Three *condamnés* should die this morning ; but, *ma foi ! que voulez-vous ? Monsieur le Président a changé d’avis.* ”

“ Who ?—which ? Tell me ; good God, speak ! ” Piers cried.

“ *Ma foi !* I do not know ; I forget. Let me see. There are so many of them. But, if you will, this is the paper : read it for yourself. It is no great thing,” he went on : “ they spare the life of one man ; and, *Ciel !* there are so many. But this time it pleases me. *C’est bien ! Communiste, si vous voulez, oui ; mais c’est égal, il est un brave. Monsieur, adieu.* ”

Piers moved from him : his hand dropped from the rein ; the soldier passed slowly on.

It was a short list—three names, the *condamnés* of this morning.

Across one name a line was drawn—opposite one name, on the margin, some words were written.

His head swam ; he could not read for the hot tears that rushed to his eyes. What was this ?



Had some mysterious messenger visited the members of the Council of Pardons in the dark watches of the bygone night, warning them against the dark deed they intended—bidding them to stain not their hands, nor the pages of French history, with this innocent blood ?

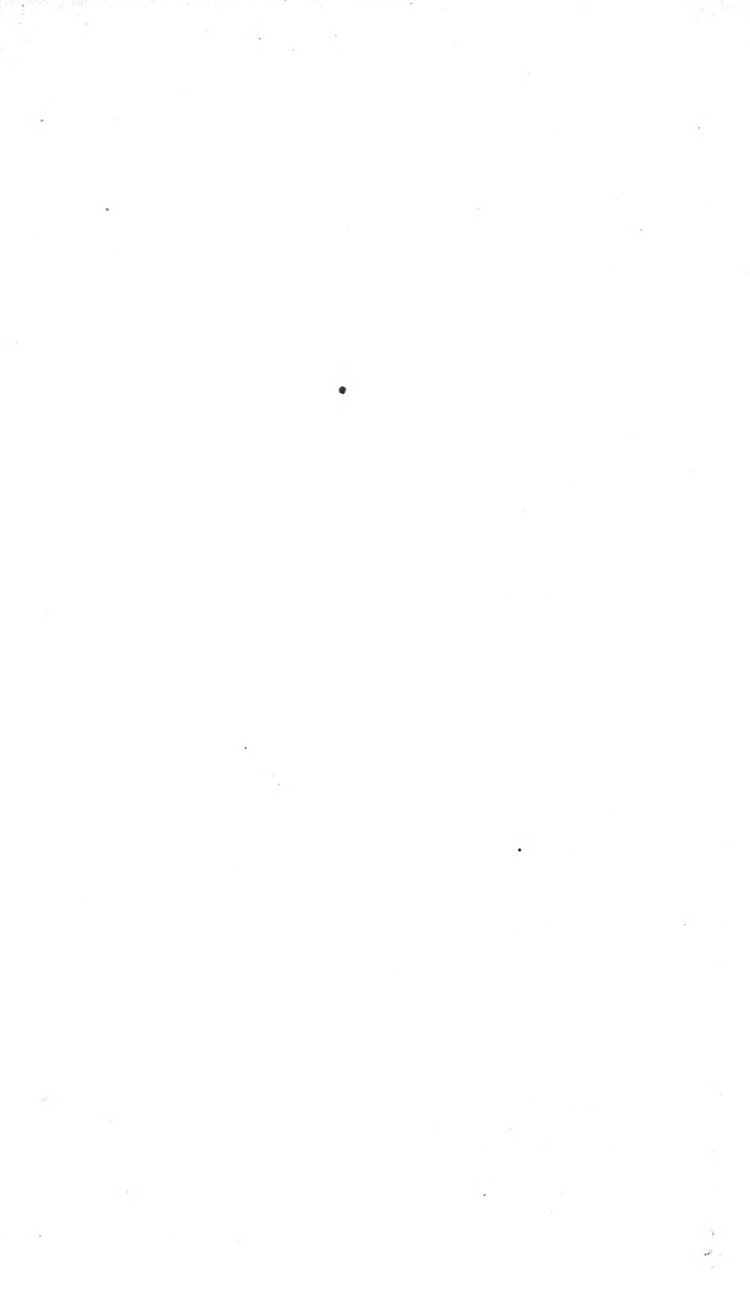
It is impossible to tell : why it was, how it came to pass, was revealed to no one.

But—on that piece of paper, carrying its messages of human life and death,—the line was drawn across, the words were written opposite, the name of—

VICTOR LESCAR.

THE END.





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